

TOWARD THE DECOLONIZATION OF THE
INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH IN THE
WEST INDIES

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Cornelius Gray
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Cornelius Gray

*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

C. Dean Freudenberger

R. Maloy

June 4, 1975
Date

Joseph O. Kephart, Jr.
Dean

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ABSTRACT

After over three hundred years of colonial influence, the Church in the West Indies tends to operate in a colonial context. But an independent West Indian society is dissatisfied with colonial thought patterns. Thus West Indians expect the Church to shed its colonial outlook. But in practice, the Church is still reflecting colonial thinking.

This research is done from growing West Indian theological and socio-cultural literature, and from the writer's experience as a native of the West Indies. It is focusing on the theological contributions of Idris Hamid and William Watty, in particular, against the backdrop of Caribbean social ferment articulated by West Indian scholars and analysts of the Caribbean society.

For the Church in the West Indies to realize its full maturity, it must jettison colonial theology which made for the underdevelopment of Caribbean peoples; and the Church must structure a meaningful theology which is born of West Indian religious and cultural milieu. In this atmosphere, the teachings of Christ in the West Indies will make men fully Christian and fully West Indian.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

After over three hundred years of colonial influence, the Church in the West Indies tends to operate in a colonial context. But an independent West Indian society is dissatisfied with colonial thought patterns. Thus West Indians expect the Church to shed its colonial outlook. But in practice, the Church is still reflecting colonial thinking.

The Thesis

To delineate historical factors which contributed to the past and present stance of the institutional Church in the West Indies; to point out the possibilities in the West Indian Church for the reflection of Caribbean culture and theological perspectives.

The Importance of the Study

Colonialism took place on many levels, namely, political, economic, cultural and religious. Political independence is only "the ribbon-cutting stage of decolonization." This political independence has not gone as far as the cultural and religious where Colonialism carried out its most evil work. It is here the imperialism of the West Indian Spirit

is to be found.

In the Caribbean the search of the human spirit for freedom, wholeness and authenticity has expressed itself in many ways. But the Church in this region has been oblivious of the quest. It has even failed to see the role it has played in the subjugation of the human spirit, so that the Church in independent West Indian states is viewed as "the last bastion of colonialism."¹

The West Indian Church is so tied to Europe and its culture that it turns a deaf ear to the West Indian questions. The following are some of these questions: "Where is God in West Indian history?" "Why was there a dichotomy between body and Spirit in the colonial era?" "Is the African drum less sacred than the European organ?"

Today thinking people are questioning the close association between the Church and the traditional holders of power in West Indian society. And rightly so, because the Church has been most comfortable with the wealthy and the powerful. Consequently it has not been sensitive to the needs of the poor and suffering in society, to say nothing of championing their cause.

In light of the above-mentioned facts, the importance of this study is: 1. to point out the extent to which colonial theology has inhibited the religious and cultural

¹Idris Hamid, In Search of New Perspectives (San Fernando, Trinidad: Catholic News Printery, 1971), p. 12.

expression of West Indians and contributed to their underdevelopment; 2. to challenge the Church in the West Indies to unfetter itself from colonial theology and carve out a theological path which leads to dignity, selfhood and development of West Indians; 3. to challenge the Church to validate and promote West Indian Culture, for only when the West Indian Church speaks in the context of the Caribbean culture will it be speaking to West Indians; 4. to sensitize and challenge the Christian Church in the Caribbean to work for the creation of a just society here and now. For if the Church's message is always pointing to the beyond and not to the now, then that message, to the oppressed, is an opiate administered by the oppressor. But the Church should be comfortable fighting for justice for the poor, for justice and righteousness are the hallmarks of Christianity; 5. to point out some likely theological contributions that Afro-Creole cults can make in the formation of a West Indian theology; and 6. to press the question of the operation of God in West Indian history.

A study testing the thesis already mentioned can contribute significantly to the "recovery of the self, the purging of the presence of colonialism from the recesses of our being."²

²Ibid., pp. 6-7.

Limitation of the Study

This project confines itself to the historical study of the role of the Church in the West Indies and the effects of its colonial theology on the black people of the region. By examining the historical situation and exposing the colonial baggage of the West Indian Church, this paper hopes to identify areas for further research in a West Indian theology.

Work Already Done in the Field

Idris Hamid said that Caribbean theology must discover God anew. "In doing so it must destroy the structures that encase him, these structures are not only ecclesiastical. They are social, economic, and political as well. These are inevitable political implications in the 'decolonizing' of God. If you wish to displace the God of the plantation system, with the Exodus God or the God who is the father of Jesus Christ, then the system must go."³

Secondly, William Watty's essay, "The Decolonization of Theology," is recognized as a major contribution to the growing literature on West Indian theology. Watty points out that the ascendancy of Christianity in the Western world in the Middle Ages made Europe the heir of Judeo-Christian traditions. As a result, Christian theology was so interpreted "to establish the emergence of modern Europe within

³Idris Hamid, "Theology and Caribbean Development," in David Mitchell (ed.) With Eyes Wide Open (Bridgetown, Barbados: CADC, 1973), p. 126.

the divine economy, and to provide theological basis for European dominance. . . ." Watty continues by saying, "The proper content . . . for theology in the colonial era must be the ambitious claims which Europeans made for themselves vis-a-vis other peoples and cultures with whom they came into contact."⁴

Watty's work here is significant in that it points out that Colonial theology which was taught in the West Indies was highly colored with Europeans' inflated view of themselves vis-a-vis other peoples' religious concepts and cultures. Thus it delineates how African religions and culture in the West Indies came to be stigmatized and belittled. Therefore, Watty's essay is of prime importance to this study for it both delineates the historical factors which contribute to the stance of the institutional Church in the West Indies and makes room for West Indian theological thought.

Both Hamid and Watty point to the possibilities in the West Indian Church for the reflection of Caribbean culture and theological perspectives. These two authors do not speak from a theoretical understanding of the West Indian Church; they speak from on-the-spot observation of the issues with which the Church needs to deal. They are seeking to liberate a people culturally, theologically and otherwise, by carving out a West Indian theological path for the Church

⁴William Watty, "The Decolonization of Theology," in Idris Hamid (ed.) Troubling of the Waters (San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahaman Printery, 1973), p. 56.

in the West Indies. Consequently, these authors' works unequivocally support the thesis of this work.

Methodology

This research is being done from growing West Indian theological and socio-cultural literature. It is focusing on the theological contributions of Idris Hamid and William Watty, in particular, against the backdrop of Caribbean social ferment articulated by Rex Nettleford, Walter Rodney and Frank McDonald.

Definition of Terms

West Indian Church. All Christian denominations which operate in the Commonwealth Caribbean, but which owe their allegiance to parent Church bodies in Europe and North America.

West Indian culture. This includes knowledge, belief, art, law, and customs acquired by West Indians from Europeans, Africans, and Asians. These were put into the crucible of Caribbean society. The result: a blending of all three cultures, plus the input from Caribbean society.

Historical factors. What is being thought of here are slavery and the plantation system, British colonialism, and the blending of colonial politics with mission theology.

West Indian theology. The study of God, His relation

to man, the dispensation of His providence, His will with respect to man's action viewed against the backdrop of a dominantly black Caribbean society.

Colonialism. A state of affairs in which a strong political power forcibly occupies an undeveloped country and exploits that country's economic resources, its people, and its culture.

West Indies. The Caribbean territories which were colonies of Great Britain have, since the 'sixties, described themselves formally as the Commonwealth Caribbean, replacing the older nomenclature, "British West Indies." The term is, however, interchangeable with the name "West Indies," a more common usage among natives of the region. Commonwealth Caribbean, or West Indies, comprises the independent countries of Jamaica; Trinidad and Tobago; Barbados; Guyana; Grenada; Bahamas; the Associated States of Antigua, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, St. Kitts-Nevis, and the internally self-governing state of British Honduras; and the more traditional colonial types of colonies of British Virgin Islands and Anguilla.⁵

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter Two narrates the colonization of the New World

⁵Rex Nettleford, Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica (Kingston, Jamaica: Collins and Sangster, 1970), p. 235.

by Europeans. It points out that these explorations were done in the name of God and the Roman Catholic Church. Emphasis is placed on British colonial rule in the West Indies, giving particular attention to the role of the Church in the West Indies before and after slavery.

Chapter Three presents an independent West Indian society struggling with hangovers of colonialism. It instances classism and the maldistribution of wealth. It then deals with the recent Black Power movement and its crusade against the colonial hangovers which the West Indian society tends to overlook.

Chapter Four deals with the impact of African religions on West Indians and their culture. It points out that the Afro-Creole cults, by their protest against European Christianity, were the forerunners of the present liberation theological thrust in the West Indies. By so doing, these cults have preserved much of African culture in the West Indies. They have also provided certain African religious elements which should be considered in the structuring of a West Indian theology.

Chapter Five informs the reader that the Church can only be meaningful in the West Indies when it speaks to West Indians in their cultural milieu and to their unique needs. It posits a church which will reflect West Indian culture and theological thought. It also seeks a new understanding of theology which will allow the liberation of Caribbean peoples from economic exploitation.

That the teachings of Christianity in the West Indian Church should be interpreted to allow West Indians to be fully West Indian and fully Christian is the whole point of Chapter Six.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN COLONIAL CARIBBEAN

A. THE IBERIAN EPOCH OF CONQUEST

1. Presuppositions of European Ecclesiastice

The shape of Western Christian theology as we have it today came out of a European milieu. Consequently, Christianity came to us in the New World dressed in European garb. In this connection William Watty's insightful observation is relevant:

The ascendancy of Christianity in the West in the Middle Ages made Europe the heir and bastion of Christian traditions and the medium through which they were disseminated throughout the world. As an inevitable consequence, Christian theology was so interpreted and developed in the west as to encourage the illusion of a Christendom to establish the emergence of modern Europe within the divine economy, and provide a theological basis for European dominance and for the advancement of European prestige.¹

Therefore, the proper context for theology in the colonial era was the ambitious claims which Europeans made for themselves vis-a-vis other peoples and other cultures with whom they associated.²

¹William Watty, "The Decolonization of Theology," in Hamid (ed.) Troubling of the Waters, p. 56.

²Ibid.

2. Age of Exploration

Europeans coming to the New World must be viewed in the context of Europeans' presuppositions of themselves and their desires. So when Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean he planted a cross as one of his first acts. "But," as Philip Potter says, "it was the Arawaks and the Caribs, the black and later Indians and Chinese indentured labourers who bore that cross for centuries." It was also ironical that he called the island Salvador-Saint Saviour.³ However, Columbus was just one of a series of European navigators and explorers who went in quest of new lands and new sea routes. With the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire and the emergence of the nation states, trade and commerce and exploration of new sources of wealth became for the European states a matter of great concern. Out of this situation the Atlantic supplanted the Mediterranean, and colonies in their turn sprang up.

As William Watty has rightly pointed out, "Few subjects relating to the expansion of Europe are better documented than the close alliance and interdependence of church and state as the Iberian conquest of the New World."

3. Papal Bulls and their Significance

Papal Bulls promoted Spanish claims to possession of

³Philip Potter, "Forward," in Mitchell (ed.) With Eyes Wide Open, p. 1.

the new world. Pope Alexander VI in 1493 and 1501 and Pope Julius II in 1508 both legitimized Spanish colonization of the Americas for the conversion of the native Indians to the Roman Catholic faith. According to Watty, "Explicit in these Bulls and central to them was a theology of divine sovereignty exercised through a European ecclesiastic who claimed to be God's Vice Regent, and who arrogated to himself the right to dispose the lands and kingdoms of the earth to whomsoever he deemed to be worthy."⁴

In all this we can see that Europeans assumed a God-given right to claim for themselves, and apportion among themselves, the lands and peoples on the other side of the Atlantic. It must be noted that they did this without any consultation with the indigenous peoples of these lands about what choices or preferences they might have had in the matter. This is a theology of colonization. According to Watty, "It is not a question of whether good conquistadors and bad conquistadors, a white legend as well as black legend, zealous missionaries as well as squalid adventurers, Las Casas and Pizarro. The point is that the name of God was directly, explicitly and unequivocally invoked in order to establish the right of Europeans to impose themselves on the rest of mankind, and to justify the wresting of territory from indigenous peoples."⁵

⁴Watty, p. 57.

⁵Ibid., p. 58.

The theology contained in these papal documents was pious frauds which were used for political and economic opportunism. In this connection, Watty makes the following observations:

1. "Alexander VI of the house of Borgias, no paragon of virtue, was the pope who bestowed the New World to the Spanish sovereign, for he himself was an Aragonize by birth."

2. It is significant that when the papal Bulls were amended in the treaty of Tordesellas and the boundaries were withdrawn to give Portugal possession of Brazil, no divine wrath was aroused at this audacious "sacrilege" and not a murmur came from the Vatican.

3. It is astonishing that the second voyage of Columbus, which was publicized as missionary enterprise for the conversion of the Indians, had only six priests out of the total number of 1,200 persons.

4. It is also significant that missionary activity tended to concentrate in those areas of the Caribbean and the mainland where mineral deposits were in abundance. Not even the "ripples of missionary activity reached the Lesser Antilles or that vast continent north of the Rio Grande."⁶

a. Requirimento. What was intended by the "conversions of Indians?" The methods utilized in the conversion process will tell. Method (1) Requirimento: This was a

⁶Ibid., pp. 58, 59.

method by which a statement was read by a colonist informing the Indian that he was converted to Christianity; consequently, he now belonged to God and the Pope and his land was taken away. If the natives resisted, the agents of the Pope were absolved in advance of the death and destruction that they would rain on the Indians. The closing sentence of the Requirimento read: ". . . and I protest that all the death and destruction which may come from this is your own fault, and not his majesty's or mine, or that of my men."⁷

b. Encomienda. This was another method of conversion in which a certain number of Indians were given to the Spanish colonist to labor for him with the understanding that he would protect and Christianize them. As Steven Neil points out, this plan failed because of the cupidity and harshness of the Spaniards.⁸ The policy of Encomienda (recommendation) was explained by a royal order sent in 1503 to Ovanda, Governor of Hispaniola. "Because of the excessive liberty the Indians have been permitted to flee from Christians and do not work. Therefore, they are to be compelled to work, so that the Kingdom and the Spaniard may be enriched and the Indians Christianized."

It must be observed that the Indians were not a tabula rasa. The Aztecs of Mexico and the Incas of Peru had highly

⁷Ibid., p. 59.

⁸Stephen Neil, A History of Christian Missions (London: Watson and Niney, 1964), p. 170.

developed civilizations even surpassing that of some European countries. But the Spaniards had not even a modicum of respect for the Indians and their culture.⁹

Sixteenth century Spanish concepts of the Indians were expressed in the following statement by the Spanish historian Gonzalo de Ovisdo Y Valdes: "They are naturally lazy and vicious, melancholic, cowardly, and in general a lying, shiftless people. Their marriages are not a sacrament but a sacrilege. They are idolatrous, libidinous, and commit sodomy. Their chief desire is to eat, drink, worship heathen idols, and commit bestial obscenities."¹⁰

B. THE ANGLO SAXON ASCENDANCY

The attitude of European colonists to the non-Europeans is fundamentally important to understand the historical role of the Church in the Caribbean. The tendencies exhibited by the Spanish colonists were duplicated in the behavior of the English, French, Dutch, and Danish colonists who set up rival colonies in the Caribbean in the seventeenth century.¹¹

Anglo Saxon involvement in the Caribbean came as a direct challenge to Spanish leadership and their monopolization of trade. The treaty of Cateau-Cambresis in 1559 with its

⁹Watty, p. 60.

¹⁰Neil, p. 171.

¹¹Keith Hunt, "The Church in Caribbean Development," in Mitchell (ed.), p. 136.

dictum "no peace below the line" may be seen as a terminus a quo. It made the Caribbean a fighting ground for the contending European nations on the Atlantic seaboard. These nations in the heat of Protestant Reformation repudiated the right of Popes to give and withhold territories as they pleased. Thus the period was marked by the crowning of sugar as King and consequently the institution of slavery for economic purposes. The transportation of people from Africa and India to support the sugar industry in the Caribbean came to have lasting effects on the shape of the Caribbean.

It is astonishing that the slave trade conducted at a time of acute religious ferment continued so long without theological reflection. But it did, for the Reformation was emphasizing the importance of doctrinal positions rather than ethical relations between the races of men.¹²

Out of this lack of concern for the dignity of the human person, European Christianity approved slavery. It is interesting to note that one of the ships which transported slaves from Africa to the New World was called "Jesus" of Lubick; thus identifying the Lord's name with the traffic of slavery.¹³

In the English colonies, the Established Church and the Non-conformist Churches had different roles. It is important to indicate their respective roles.

¹²Watty, p. 61.

¹³Ibid.

1. The Established Church in the British West Indies

The colonial charters that were issued by the state to the founders of the colonies generally placed them under the obligation to make provision for the practice of the state religion within these respective colonies. This meant that the Colonial Administration recruited ministers of the established church for service in the colonies, paid their stipend and facilitated the overall growth of the colonial church.¹⁴

Consequently in the old established British colonies like Barbados, Jamaica, Antigua, and British Guiana the official church was the Anglican. For the planters, its presence was more important than its preaching. The planter class showed little interest in religion as mentor to their daily lives. For them, religion was a symbol of the society from which they had come.

The planter class throughout the Caribbean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a minority amidst the large black population which their economic needs demanded. But they were a powerful minority controlling and manipulating the slaves' lives and the lives of people of color as a whole. Powerful as they were, they could not be insensitive to the fact that the social system they had created was in turn shaping them--their basic European natures

¹⁴Robert Moore, "The Role of the Churches in the Caribbean," GISRA, II (September 1971), 34.

were being altered by the blacks whose culture they despised. According to Robert Moore, "The more this became evident the more it was necessary for them to emphasise the continuity of their cultural norms with those of the homeland. They were asserting their essential Britishness at least by ritual, if not by practice."

This sort of ritual was provided by the Anglican Church. The planters' identification with the Anglican Church convinced them of the identity of their class with the ruling classes in England. This was supposed to convince the ruling classes at home that their white brethren in the slave colonies had changed their location but certainly not their outlook.¹⁵

Yet it must not be forgotten that the Church in Protestant colonies served a peculiar and crucial function. It was an institution which the slaves did not have, and one in which they were not allowed to participate. Consequently, the Church constituted one of these differences between the master and the slave which the masters felt gave slave society its stability. The slaves could be classified as barbaric and heathen while the masters were seen as civilized and Christian. In the words of Dr. Robert Moore, "The established Churches were a sort of tribal religion buttressing the powerful mystique of the white tribe giving it a strong esprit de corps and by tolerating no outsiders suggesting a secret

¹⁵Ibid.

source of ascendancy."¹⁶

The Church as a social institution derived its sustenance and goals from the European element in the Caribbean society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was an integral part of that element in the society. It is worthy of note that even when individual churchmen working in the Caribbean made the case for the conversion of the slaves, local forces were powerful enough to kill the idea. This was done by starving it of resources. The planter saw as the principal solution to his problem of lordship (due to the greater number of blacks than whites) the continued subordination of the blacks. To the planter the best means of effecting that result was denying the blacks a sense of community and erecting an absolute barrier to upward social mobility.

The point was most clearly set forth by Richard Ligon, the Englishman who visited Barbados at the height of the Sugar Revolution of the seventeenth century and left posterity an account of a conversation he had with a planter on this burning issue of Christianizing slaves. According to Keith Hunte (lecturer of history at the University of the West Indies), Ligon recalled that he suggested to a local planter that one of his slaves, Sambo, should be allowed to prepare himself for baptism since he desired to be a Christian and was intelligent enough to understand what he was doing. The

¹⁶Hunt, pp. 139-140.

planter's reply was to the effect that "the people of that island were governed by the laws of England, and by those laws we could not make a Christian slave . . . [that] being once a Christian he could no more account him a slave, and so lose the hold they had on them as slaves, by making them Christians; and by that means should open such a gap as all the planters in the island would curse him."¹⁷ It is evident that whatever the laws of England were on the Christianization of slaves, in the colonies the baptism of blacks was discouraged; and those who encouraged such baptism were socially ostracized.

Another reason for the denial of baptism to the slaves in the British colonies was the argument that the slaves' "barbaric" minds could not comprehend the rationality of the Christian faith. Consequently, the result of Christianizing them would be confusion which would be dangerous to the system of slavery.

However, in colonies like Trinidad where the Roman Catholic religion prevailed, baptism was given to the slaves. This posture would seem to have been the policy of the Spanish and also the Catholic Church; for the Popes sanctioned the baptism of Indians and later, Negroes. But it is significant that in San Dominique when slavery was increased and the system of slavery more stabilized, the interest of the planters in getting their slaves to church declined. The desire to

¹⁷ Moore, p. 34.

use religion as a badge of difference came to the forefront there, as well as in the British Colonies.¹⁸

Because of the prevailing attitude in the British Colonies mentioned above, it is evident why the English Government's directives to governors, urging them to take steps to provide for the conversion of Negro slaves, went unheeded.¹⁹ In this connection, J. Bennett in his book, Bondsmen and Bishops, points out that in eighteenth century Barbados, the employment of Catechist on Codrington Estate, to catechise the slaves was frowned on by the local plantocracy, and also failed to win the support of the local clergy.²⁰

2. The Nonconformist Missions

It is significant that the next initiative to integrate the churches' work as mission to the whole society, not only came from outside the colonies, but from non-conformist groups which were tolerated in the English colonies. The coming of the Moravians, Baptist and Methodist missionaries in the middle of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, witnessed a new assault on the traditional position.²¹

Because of the Methodist revival in England and the

¹⁸Hunt, pp. 139-140.

¹⁹J. Bennett, Bondsmen and Bishops (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), p. 77.

²⁰J. E. Hutton, A History of Moravian Missions (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1922), p. 52.

²¹Hunt, pp. 139-140.

Evangelical Movement, there was a shift in Protestant Christianity from an emphasis on head religion to heart religion. Thus the "anti-thesis was no longer between civilized Christian reasonableness and the barbaric muddle beyond Europe: it was between grace and sin, salvation and damnation, corruption and purity." Consequently, the Negro in the Caribbean was seen as one having a soul that was in danger of being damned because it was unexposed to the gospel. Curiously enough, the missionaries reasoned that the Negro's soul must be saved, even if he has to remain in slavery.²²

That the missionaries were only interested in the spiritual conditions of the slave, and not the slave society, can be proven by an address to slaves in St. Thomas (1739) by Count Zinzendorf: ". . . God punished the first negroes by making them slaves, and your conversion will make you free, not from the control of your masters, but simple from your wicked habits and thoughts, and all that make you dissatisfied with your lot." This was representative of eighteenth century missionary thought.²³

Elsa Goveia, in her book, Slave Society in the British West Indian Islands, described missionary trends in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Caribbean. She clearly states that it is an undisputed fact that the missionaries' (in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) only interest

²²Moore, p. 35.

²³Watty, p. 63.

in the West Indian slave society was in saving of souls. They were concerned exclusively with the religious state of their converts, and the social conditions of the slaves were of interest to them only insofar as they affected the progress of the work of the Missions. The Christian missions in the West Indies at the end of the eighteenth century were following the example of the Moravian church. Goveia cites James Ramsey's observation: "The church tried to lose sight of slavery and its consequences, and to show their converts to themselves only in the light of a religious society."

The missionaries, particularly in the Leeward Islands, were so overly concerned about their religious freedom that their very action spelt support for the white ruling class of the society. To secure toleration for the carrying on of their missionary enterprise, the missionaries accepted slavery and the necessity for subordination which it entailed. The missionaries believed that one of their chief tasks was to inculcate in their Negro converts the duty of submitting to their masters and other forms of authority. Goveia quotes Richard Watson, a Methodist leader whose statement was true of all Christian missionaries in the Caribbean, as saying that missionaries "constantly [were] instructed to consider their object and appointment as purely religious, not to interfere at all in the civil relations of master and slave, except by enforcing the Christian precept on that point--servants [i.e., slaves] obey in all things your masters according to the flesh and as far as they could, with good

conscience with the great business of instructing and Christianizing the Negro slaves, to conform to the regulations and even prejudices of the whites."²⁴

Therefore by preaching submission to the slaves, the missionaries were making a highly significant contribution to the maintenance of slavery and the slave society. According to Goveia, "Anything that strengthened the principle of subordination increased the stability of the established social order." Subordination which was the keynote of the whole Caribbean society, was also the keynote of the missionaries' teachings among the slaves. The missionaries saw as a part of their duty the need to convince the slaves that it was their moral obligation to accept their inferior status and subjection to the will of others--the whites.

Dr. Coke, cited by Goveia, suggested that the activities of the Christian missions offered political advantages to the West Indian planters. At a time when the spread of the French Revolution in the West Indies seemed to pose an imminent threat to the continuation of the slave society, the missionaries were using their influence to enforce the submission of their Negro converts to the control of the white ruling class.

At a time when the humanitarians in England were attacking the social system of the West Indies and demanding

²⁴Elsa V. Goveia, Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 305.

amelioration, the missionaries were instilling in the Negro a loyalty and sense of moral obligation to his master. This they thought would lessen the need for the master's severity in maintaining the subordination of the Negroes.²⁵

So under ordinary and normal circumstances the missionaries supported the status quo. Theirs was a movement that was committed to the negative principle, "Don't rock the boat." But this boat was destined to leak and run aground due to outside pressures and internal circumstances.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the attitude of missionaries toward slavery was changing. They were now to question the legitimacy of slavery, for the institution was hindering the progress of their work. This operated on three levels. In the first place, the planters' approach to missions was hardening into hostility toward missionaries as the pressures against slavery began to rise in England. The missionaries were dubbed local agents of the Abolition Movement.

Secondly, the missionaries observed that on the estates where Christian converts were on the increase, there was no corresponding decrease in the measure of brutality meted out to these slaves.²⁶

Thirdly, the missionaries soon discovered that the moral degradation of the Negroes was not due to "heathenism"

²⁵Ibid, pp. 305-306.

²⁶Moore, p. 35.

as they had thought. But it had been caused by the harsh pressures of their subjection in a slave society which had robbed them of their self respect and debased their culture. The missionaries saw converts who faithfully attempted to practice Christian morality fail, and it was evident that their failure in morality was mainly due to their way of life. They were forced to conclude with Clement Cains regarding slavery that "it is the nature of slavery to contaminate whatever it touches or approaches." Hence, contrary to the Mission's stance that its task was not the effecting of social change, the missionaries were forced to fight to destroy the institution of slavery because it threatened their success and the very existence of missions in the Caribbean.²⁷

The missionaries in Jamaica, particularly the Baptists, took a different position than their counterparts in the Leeward Islands. The Baptists in Jamaica assumed a revolutionary stance on the slave question. After the slave rebellion in Jamaica in 1783, the leading Baptist missionaries, Knibb, Burchell, and Philipo, went to England to persuade the British public that if emancipation did not come from "above," it would come from "below."²⁸

It is reasonable to conclude that the missionaries of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century West Indies were

²⁷Goveia, pp. 309-310.

²⁸Moore, p. 35.

not committed to disturb the slave society, even with the Gospel. Their whole interest was the conversion of the slave's soul but they had little or no regard for his body and the sufferings which that body was experiencing. It was not their intention to overthrow slavery.²⁹ The missionary ethic was so much evidenced among the eighteenth century Moravians in the Danish Islands that in 1770 Benjamin Trobe, a Moravian in St. Thomas, reported that in the Danish Islands the magistrates declared that they themselves had more confidence in the baptised Negroes as security to the country than the country's forts.³⁰ Therefore, the hostility of the planters and the failure to maintain Puritan morality among the slave converts influenced the missionaries' fight against the institution of slavery.

3. Emancipation in the British West Indies

In 1823 after the Amelioration Act, the British Government appointed two Anglican bishops in the West Indies to prevent attempts at revolution among the slaves. Here the function of the established church was to reconcile the planters to the decline of their arbitrary authority over the slaves while reconciling the excited Negroes to the slow death of slavery.³¹

²⁹Goveia, p. 273.

³⁰Moore, p. 36.

³¹Hunt, p. 142.

But emancipation came suddenly in 1833 as a bullet to West Indian Plantocracy and a deliverance to the Negro slaves. It is significant that the chief heroes of the abolition of slavery were not the clerics of the Anglican church but non-conformists and "men who never saw the islands, but who took up the cause of human liberty as their outrage, and thus initiated the abolition for all peoples of the status of serfdom and chattelege."³²

However, a decade after emancipation, Churchmen in the colonies were disappointed at the slow progress of the ex-slaves in the area of morality and the Negro's holding Christianity in co-existence with African religious beliefs. As the century wore on, Victorian cultural arrogance increased and the missionaries came to believe that persons whose sexual practices deviated from their own were suffering from deep cultural defects. Thus the practice of "African superstition," the presumed lack of industrious habits among the Negroes, and sexual irregularities were by the 1860s assumed to be the main characteristics of the West Indian Negro. Missionaries felt that the Negro was a child of nature, despite his churchgoing. The chief way, they thought, to remedy the "inherent flaw" in the Negro's character was by education. Thus the Churches, for the remainder of the nineteenth century, devoted almost all their energies to the schooling of the Negroes. The missionaries hoped that the Negro would

³² Alfred Caldecott, English Colonization and Empire (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 89.

acquire certain disciplined attitudes to life and a sense of responsibility.³³

It is a fact that the influence of the Church was outstanding in its contribution to education of the Caribbean peoples. Nearly all the Christian denominations in the Caribbean had become involved in the teaching of the three Rs and Christian ethics. Later formal education was spearheaded by the churches to prepare the minds of people for life in a free society. However, as Hunte points out, the work of the Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists in fostering the development of free villages, particularly in Jamaica and British Guiana in the mid-nineteenth century was the most significant contribution made by churchmen to the development of post-emancipation West Indian society. Its significance lay in the fact that ex-slaves could now participate in the development of peasant communities free from the tyrannical atmosphere of plantation service. In these communities, the small farmers were able to relate to one another and shape their lives without the menacing influence of a plantation manager.

However, despite the keen interest the missionaries showed toward the ex-slaves in the post-emancipation era, there were certain tendencies among the missionaries that were deplorable.

The following incidents bring into sharp focus some

³³Moore, III, 17.

of these tendencies: (1) Though the non-conformist missionaries saw in the slaves souls for whom Christ died (and consequently, souls to be saved), they, like their fellow European colonists, thought the Negroes were inherently an inferior race. Consequently, they taught the ex-slaves a gospel of submission. Furthermore, the whole content and purpose of mission education was provided and tailored to subordinate the slaves as an inferior class to the white ruling class. The planters demanded and got the promise that schools would not be used to affect adversely the supply of manual labor on the plantations, nor to encourage the "colored" people to travel too fast on the social ladder.

(2) After the change to Crown Colony Government in most of the Islands, the churches, even those which championed Abolition, were all quiescent on the subject of politics. They would discuss marginal issues in society rather than questioning the fundamental basis of the society as a whole. After the end of the century, the churches concentrated on education and the so-called moral uplifting of the members of their congregations, and assisted them in their day-to-day personal problems without dealing with big problems in society that gave rise to those petty problems.

(3) When the East Indians came from India to the West Indies as indentured servants between 1834-1841, they posed problems for the missionaries and Colonists. At first they thought that the Indians with their stable family life and sense of industry would help Negroes who the missionaries

felt were lacking in these areas. After some time elapsed, the Indians showed a firmness toward holding on to their native religions and consequently demonstrated little or no interest in Christianity. The missionaries then began to think that the "heathen" Indians would corrupt the Christianized Negroes.

However, one of the worst things that happened to the Negro and East Indian relations in the West Indies was organized by the Church. This was the division of the two peoples who worked every day in the cane fields. In Trinidad and Guyana where there were many indentured East Indian workers, the Canadian Presbyterian church, to attract the Indians to Christianity, created separate Indian churches. In this connection, J. K. Grant, a Presbyterian leader in Trinidad is reported to have said that the Indians "are members of our own Aryan race." Thus, Grant was implying that the East Indians were better potentially as citizens than the descendants of Africans. T. B. Cooper, the great Presbyterian missionary in Guyana, feared that if the East Indians were mixed up with Creoles in the Church, the former would lose more than they would gain. On the contrary, the Anglicans opposed the separation of these two peoples. The Presbyterian mission was planting the seeds of division among East Indians and Negroes in Trinidad and Guyana. But the Churches in the early decades of the twentieth century did not foresee the demise of the British Empire. As long as the British held power, the two races competing against each

other would be in the interest of the Colonial power and, in some cases, in the interest of the missionaries. They saw no need of fusing a national identity out of two different peoples. In this sense the churches were creatures of their times.³⁵

One needs to look carefully to understand the ambivalence of missionaries who penetrated the Caribbean with the message of the Gospel. Evangelical missionaries played a substantial part in the emancipation of slaves and the rehabilitation of the newly emancipated. But the Christianity they preached in the Caribbean was part and parcel of Colonialism. The missionaries were so inseparably connected with Colonialism that they could not see that it was inherently evil. Watty has rightly observed that with all their devotion to the Christianization of the slaves, the missionaries could not "assert without prevarication the dignity of the slaves or their descendants as men equal in capacity to all other men and entitled to the same opportunity of selfhood as other people enjoyed. It is a sad fact, that for all their laurels, missionary opinion of black people has been very low. In missionary documents things African have been scorned and repudiated."³⁶ Where did they get these concepts? One must not blame the missionaries excessively for they were creatures of their time. To understand their

³⁵Moore, III, 18-21.

³⁶Watty, p. 62.

ambivalence and their low esteem of non-white peoples, one must look at the societies from which the missionaries came.

4. Europe's View of Non-whites

To discover the European view of non-white people, this study shall turn to the molders of English thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Most English intellectuals justified slavery which dehumanized black people. They cited different arguments for their views but all their arguments smacked of pernicious racial bigotry. The English historian Freeman, in his scant remarks on West Indian slavery said, "The existence of the slave, harshly as the name now grates on our ears, is no special shame or blame to our forefathers. . . . And we must not forget that, in many states of society the doom of slavery may have been thankfully received as an alleviation of his lot by the man whose life was forfeited either as a prisoner in merciless warfare or as wrong-doer sentenced for his crimes."³⁷

The brilliant historian Lord Acton took the same line of argument as Freeman. He said that under certain conditions slavery was "a stage on the road to freedom." In his lecture on the beginning of modern states, Lord Acton said, "It did not seem an intollerable wrong thing to rescue men from devil-worshippers who mangled their victims on the Niger of the Congo." His famous apologia for slavery comes in his

³⁷Eric Williams, British Historians and West Indies (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 77.

issue on Civil War in America.

If my present theme were the institution of slavery in general, I should endeavour to show that it has been a mighty instrument not for evil only but for good in the providential order of the World. Almighty God, in His mysterious ways, has poured down blessings even through servitude itself, by awakening the Spirit of Sacrifice on the one hand, and the Spirit of Charity on the other.³⁸

These two writers posited a people who were degenerate even prior to their slavery. Consequently, they had the warped and unconscionable mind to see slavery as salvation for African people. Acton even had the audacity to make God sanction the institution of slavery.

Next comes the contribution of the well-known English historian and popular nineteenth century writer, Carlyle. From his poisoned mind and vitriolic pen came his book, Occasional Discourse Upon the Nigger Question. The book, published in 1849, is the most offensive document in the world on slavery and the West Indies. He bitterly opposed Negro Emancipation on the ground that "it made for idleness among blacks." He described the emancipated Negro in British Guyana as "beautiful Black sitting there up to his ears with pumpkins and doleful whites sitting here without potatoes to eat." "Emancipation," he declared, "made the West Indians a black Ireland, a country of idle Black Gentlemen, such with rum in his hand, no breeches on his body, pumpkin at discretion, and the fruitful region of the earth going back to jungle round."

In reference to the Emancipated Negroes' little plot

³⁸Ibid., p. 79.

of land where they planted some crops, Carlyle said:

With regard to the West Indies it may be laid down as a principle, that no Black man who will not work according to what ability the gods have given him for working, has the smallest right to eat pumpkin, or any fraction of land that will grow pumpkin, however plentiful such land may be; but has an indisputable and perpetual right to be compelled, by the real proprietors of said land, to do competent work for his living. . . . I say if Black gentleman is born to be servant, and in fact, is useful in God's creation only as a servant, then let him hire not by the month but by a much longer term.

That he be "hired for life" is really the essence of the position Carlyle held. In the same book he referred to the West Indians as "insolent two-legged cattle . . . 'happy' over their abundant pumpkin." Then he continued his bitter sarcasm.

Not a pumpkin Quashee, not a square yard of soil, till you agree to do the state so many days of service. . . . Not a Black Ireland . . . but a regulated West Indies with black working population in adequate numbers. You are not slaves now; nor I wish if it can be avoided, to see you slaves again; but decidedly you will have to be servants to those that are born wiser than you, that are born lords of you; servants to the Whites, if they are (as what mortal can doubt they are) born wiser than you.³⁹

Eric Williams observed that Carlyle's book came about fifteen years after Emancipation and "not a voice was heard, not a funeral note against this betrayal of the humanitarian cause the British have paraded for over a century before the world." The Emancipated Slaves had not a single voice in their defense.

Carlyle advocated a return to slavery. He completed

³⁹Ibid., pp. 80-81.

his caricature of Emancipation by the following passage which defines the Negro:

Do I then, hate the Negro? No, except when the soul is killed out of him, I decidedly like poor Quashee; and find him a pretty kind man. With a pennyworth of oil, you can make a handsome glossy thing of Quashee, when his soul is not killed in him. A shift supple fellow, a merry-hearted grinning, dancing, singing, affectionate kind of creature, with a great deal of melody and amenability in his composition. This certainly is a notable fact. The black African, alone of wild-men, can live among men civilized.⁴⁰

After the Jamaican Rebellion in 1865, Carlyle wrote in Shooting Nigger and After: "One always likes the Nigger, evidently a poor blockhead with good dispositions, with affections, attachments--with a turn for Nigger Melodies, and the like, he is the only savage of all the coloured races that does not die out on the sight of the White Man; but can actually live beside him and work and increase and be merry. The Almighty Maker has appointed him to be a Servant."⁴¹

In 1859, Trollope, a prominent British novelist who went to Jamaica, complained that the Negroes were making too quick a progress in political affairs and advocated that their legislature be taken away from them. He said that a parliamentary democracy is suitable for Australia and Canada, but would be ridiculous in non-white countries like Malta, Sicily Islands, Ionian Islands and Jamaica. The very year Trollope went to Jamaica, the Duke of New Castle proclaimed that responsible government was applicable to colonists of English

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 83.

⁴¹Ibid.

race.

Trollope was just like Carlyle in his hatred for black people. He too lamented the Emancipation. His estimate of the Negro was no better than Carlyle's:

Physically he is capable of the hardest bodily work and that probably with less bodily pain than men of any other race, but he is idle, inambitious as to worldly position, sensual, content with little. Intellectually, he is apparently capable of but little sustained effort, but singularly enough he is ambitious. He burns to be regarded as a scholar, puzzles himself with fine words, addicts himself to religion for the sake of appearance and delights in aping the little graces of civilization. He despises himself thoroughly, and would probably be content to starve for a month if he could appear like a white man for a day; but yet he delights in signs of respect paid to him, black as he is, and is always thinking of his own dignity. . . . These people are a servile race, fitted by nature for the hardest physical work and apparently fitted for little else.⁴²

Englishmen's response to the Morant Bay Revolt in 1865 speaks eloquently of their low esteem for black people. In the 1860s the Jamaican masses were suffering from drought, shortages, and extremely high prices. The Jamaican Legislature, ruled by the white planter class, turned a deaf ear to the cries of the masses.

It is significant that Dr. Edward Underhill, Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society who had received many reports from Baptists living in Jamaica, wrote to the Colonial Secretary the same year warning that "it is more than time that the [lack] of wisdom that has governed Jamaica since emancipation should be brought to an end." This letter was given wide publicity in Jamaica. As a result of the letter,

⁴²Ibid., p. 92.

a group of peasants in their plight petitioned the Queen for help. Their letter was rebuffed by the Colonial Secretary.

After the request of the small farmers had been rejected, Paul Bogle, a small farmer himself, led a deputation to Governor Eyre who refused to see them. These people, on returning to their native town, Morant Bay, gathered other peasants and revolted against the white ruling class of that parish. In a battle between the peasants and the local militia, eighteen whites were killed. The governor, Eyre, declared martial law, ordered the burning of 1,000 peasant dwellings, 354 executions and 600 floggings of both sexes.

Twelve days after the rioting, Eyre hanged Paul Bogle, the leader of the deputation which had come to him for a hearing. Needing a scape-goat to blame for the whole episode, Eyre found it in one of his severest critics, George William Gordon, a mulatto, a preacher of the hated Baptist sect. Gordon had championed the cause of the poor in the Assembly and on occasions had assailed Eyre as a "cruel" and "voracious" animal.

Gordon was living in Kingston outside the area in which Martial Law had been declared. However, Eyre arrested and brought him to St. Thomas where martial law did exist. In less than two weeks after the uprising, he executed Gordon, the most articulate defender of the Negro.⁴³ What was the reaction of English people to this cruel and irresponsible

⁴³Samuel Hurwitz and Edith Hurwitz, Jamaica (London: Praeger, 1971), pp. 146-149.

use of power? Their response to Eyre's measure was both praise and horror.

Despite the findings of an English commission of enquiry that (1) the punishment of death was unnecessarily frequent; (2) the floggings were reckless . . . and barbarous; and (3) the burning of the 1,000 houses was wanton and cruel, praise of Governor Eyre won the day. The supporters of Eyre were some of the most significant literary figures in England of the 1860s--Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, Kingsley, and Dickens.

One of the main arguments of the supports of Eyre was that "Negroes cannot be equated with Europeans." The following are statements to support this line of argument:

First, that the Negroes from a low state of civilization and being under the influence of superstitious feelings, could not properly be dealt with in the same manner as might the peasantry of a European country. . . .⁴⁴

That the Negro in Jamaica and even in the freetowns of Western Africa is pestilential, I have no hesitation in declaring, nor that he is a most dangerous savage at the best. . . . When his blood is up, very cruel acts are his first acts, and these in great number. . . . I consider him a savage, and a most dangerous savage too. I believe the power and position given him in the freetowns of West Africa to have a pestilential influence; and the liberty given to him in Jamaica to have proved equally detrimental to the prosperity of that Island.⁴⁵

Professor John Tyndall, the moving spirit of the Eyre Defense Aid Committee declared: "We do not hold an Englishman and a Jamaican Negro to be convertible terms, nor do we

⁴⁴Williams, p. 120.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 137.

think the cause of human liberty will be promoted by any attempt to make them so. . . . I decline accepting the Negro as an equal of the Englishman, nor will I commit myself to the position that a Negro insurrection and an English insurrection ought to be treated in the same way."⁴⁶

Carlyle and Ruskin were perhaps the two leading defenders of Eyre's cruelties in Jamaica. These men were not necessarily irresponsible in their argument for the support of Eyre. Their argument reflects their guiding and fundamental beliefs. Carlyle believed that a moral code with a priori rules are behind nature. These rules necessitated obedience. Carlyle implied a hierarchical system of society called for total obedience to the ruler or hero. The majority of men were inferior to their leaders or heroes; consequently they needed the guidance of the heroes. The abolition of slavery was a breakdown of a system of government that was consistent with nature. There was a breakdown in the social order of society. Freedom was lost to common men--all Negroes. They rebelled for their freedom--that is, not to be forced to work. Eyre's efforts to force Negroes to work for the whites proved him to be an enlightened hero because he acted to restore an action that had divine sanction. Therefore, in the eyes of Carlyle, Eyre was innocent in killing Gordon and others; for Eyre was obeying the higher law and in so doing,

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 139.

he found it necessary to execute false prophets.⁴⁷

Ruskin, like Carlyle, felt that behind the appearances of nature there is a divine plan which revealed the organization of men in society. Men are graded in natural orders of superior and inferior. The natural order is the moral order because it is instituted by the Deity. To learn what course of action to take, according to Ruskin, "Superior men" such as critics, Governors and others could consult their feelings which were noble and which were directed by man's Maker. The "lower" order, at which level Negroes found themselves, should obey the superior ones and find in obedience the fulfillment of their nature and happiness. If they refused, they should be forced, for if they are not forced, disorder and unhappiness would result.

Ruskin thought the superior men in society were the only ones who could see the plan for society sanctioned by God. Consequently, it was the duty of the hierarchy to enforce the divinely sanctioned plan. The Eyre suppression of the uprising in Jamaica was an example of the restoration of the divinely sanctioned order of society.

On the basis of their theory, both Carlyle and Ruskin saw Eyre as one who acted to preserve the divine plan and Gordon as one who was engaged in the devil's business.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Peter Zoller, "Revolt in Jamaica: A Study of Carlyle, Ruskin, Mill and Hurley" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1970), pp. 56-58.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 159-161.

5. Colonialism and Missions

It is evident that this racist view of black people which was rife in nineteenth century England greatly influenced the missionary concept of black people. From the English writers cited above, the following nineteenth century English thought-pattern can be deduced:

1. The Negro is by creation inferior.
2. Consequently his culture is inferior and primitive.
3. But the Negro has a soul to be saved.
1. The White race is by creation superior to the Negro race.
2. Consequently the White has established civilized societies.
3. God has entrusted to the White race the Gospel, which may be effective even among the untamed Negro race.

With this kind of reasoning it is not surprising that so-called Christian England felt it her duty to colonize black nations and in the process of colonization, civilize and Christianize this "barbaric race."⁴⁹ Therefore, a close connection between theology and colonialism existed in the post-emancipation era. For instance, a comparison of Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden" and Reginald Herber's hymn, "Greenland's Icy Mountain" clearly reveals that Christian Missions and British Colonialism were inspired by the same ideals.

"White Man's Burden"

Take up the White man's burden-
Send forth the best ye breed

⁴⁹Williams, p. 159.

Go bend your sons to exile
 To serve the captives' need;
 To wait in heavy harness
 On fluttered folk and wild-
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
 Half-devil and half-child.

"Greenland's Icy Mountain"

What though the spicy breezes
 Blow soft on Ceylon isle,
 Though every prospect pleases
 And only man is vile?
 In vain with lavish kindness
 The gifts of God are strewn
 The heathen in his blindness
 Bows down to wood and stone
 Can we whose souls are lighted
 With wisdom from on high--
 Can we to men benighted
 The lamp of truth deny?

According to Watty, "the sentiments are the same, the hypocrisy . . . [is] the same, the superiority and contempt are the same."⁵⁰ With justifiable indignation, he summed up West Indian scorn for the dastardly work of Colonial Christian missions when he said, "Having dehumanized a whole race and exploited the Caribbean to the bone, the European must now be received by half-devils and half-children and vile Ceyloneses as bearers of the light of Christian truth and civilization!"⁵¹

6. Summary

Europeans from the Middle Ages conceived the idea that God appointed them to dominate the rest of the world.

⁵⁰Watty, pp. 63-64.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 64.

They thought of themselves as the heir of Christianity after the breakup of the Roman Empire. What Israel was to the ancient world, Europe must be to the modern one.

Later, armed with this concept, Spain and Portugal came to the New World, enslaved the native Indians in South America and the Caribbean, and exploited their resources. And this they did with the blessing of the Roman Catholic Church. But their aim was not to make converts; it was to enrich the Spaniards as the royal order from Spain sent to Ovando in 1503 suggested.

In the seventeenth century, the British succeeded the Spanish in the Caribbean and perfected colonialism and slavery. They ran an Anglican Church-sanctioned slavery system heretofore unseen on this planet.

But toward the middle of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Non-conformist missionaries came on the West Indian scene determined to preach the Gospel to the slaves. They worked for and achieved the abolition of slavery. Yet, they, like their Anglican compatriots, saw Negroes as completely inferior beings. However, they were reflecting the English society of the time-- a society which saw non-white peoples as a lesser breed who needed civilization and Christianity. So the ethic of British colonialism and the Church's mission were hardly distinguishable.

CHAPTER III

INDEPENDENT CARIBBEAN AND ITS STRUGGLES WITH THE PAST

A. NATIONALISM AND INDIGENIZATION

The '60s saw the achieving of independence among the larger Caribbean Islands. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Barbados have all achieved independence, in that order. For the last two decades, West Indians have been concerned about their identity as a people. However, since the coming of independence in the '60s, there has been a wave of nationalism and justifiable pride in things West Indian.

As a case in point, a cultural nationalism in Jamaica has emerged since independence. A new look is being taken at the island's past. Since 1966, a Government-supported archaeological team established some target projects such as the excavations of Port Royal and the Indian Burial Ground in White Marl. A fresh look at the history of the West Indies is being taken with the view to present West Indian history from a West Indian point of view.

With the emphasis of placing importance on "things Jamaican," in 1967 a Folklore Research Programme was established by the Institute of Jamaica. Since then, this program has done research in riddles, proverbs, ring-games, legends, "Big Boy" stories, sayings, verses, and Nine Night

celebrations. Many of these originated in Africa.¹

Another area of change concerned national honors. In 1968, British honors were abolished. Other independent Caribbean Countries (once British Colonies) took similar steps. Jamaica, however, was the only West Indian Country that abolished knighthood. Jamaican honors replaced the British honors. Knighthood was also replaced by the Order of Jamaica while lesser ranks received the Order of Merit and Order of Distinction. A new rank, National Hero, was created and put above all other honors.² As has been intimated, this national emphasis is not confined to Jamaica but is found in all independent countries in the Caribbean.

The West Indies have made tremendous progress politically, and hopefully, culturally. But there are certain legacies of colonialism that plague the Caribbean people. Two of the most paralyzing hangovers from colonialism are Color-Classism and its twin sister, the maldistribution of wealth.

B. COLOR-CLASS SYSTEM AND INCOME

Color-class system in the Caribbean originated in slavery and was refined by colonialism.³ Under the system

¹Samuel Hurwitz and Edith Hurwitz, Jamaica (London: Praeger, 1971), pp. 215, 216.

²Ibid, p. 217.

³Frank McDonald, "The Commonwealth Caribbean," in Tad Szulc (ed.) United States and the Caribbean (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 133.

of slavery, the domestic servants and the white man's concubines and their progeny were manumitted. These were still considered legally inferior to the white man. The latter group was denied all social rights enjoyed by the whites. After some time the mulattoes were legally given some of the privileges of the whites. (The mulattoes were the result of the miscegenation between the white planters and their Negro concubines.) But there were legal distinctions between the free mulattoes and the free Negroes. Consequently, among the mulattoes or colored, distinctions based on the shade of the skin developed. This resulted in the ones nearest to white in appearance being at the top of the colored hierarchy.

The Planter-dominated society before Emancipation can be illustrated by the following pyramid:

Whites
 Free People of Color
 Freed People of Color
 Free Blacks
 Freed Blacks
 Black and Colored Slaves

The Planters stood at the apex of the pyramid and they

controlled all the wealth and political power. As the hierarchical ladder is descended, the next group is the free colored, i.e., those born free; then the freed colored who were manumitted; followed by free blacks and freed blacks. At the base of the pyramid was the largest group in the population, the black and colored slaves.

It is worthy of note that the social gradings within each of these groups were not necessarily based on occupation or income, but on actual skin color and features. The ones nearest to whites in appearance were considered superior to those whose appearance was more Negroid and so down to the full-blooded Negro.⁴

After Emancipation these distinctions were carried over into the free society. The black man still remained at the bottom of the social pyramid and "the colored" maintained their superiority to the blacks, and were themselves treated as inferior by the whites.

Despite Emancipation, supreme power and authority were in the hands of the Europeans and the blacks still had the status of a chattel. Emancipation gave a measure of freedom to the black and colored people but the white still maintained economic and political control.

Because the mulatto or colored had been favored from pre-emancipation, they profited from education and monetary advantages which had been denied the blacks; and, above all,

⁴Fernando Henriques, Family and Colour in Jamaica (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953), pp. 33-37.

their nearness to the whites in appearance. Hence, the colored were able to make good economically while the black group remained economically the weakest in the community. So the freedom of the Negro meant little or no change in the hierarchical structure of the Jamaican society. This situation persisted in Jamaica prior to 1938.⁵

Henriques observed that although great political changes were made in the Jamaican society since Emancipation, basically the hierarchical structure of the Jamaican society had not undergone much change. His research showed that the whites were still at the apex of the economic and social pyramid. In 1953, Henriques's pyramidal description of the Jamaican society looked like this:

White
Fair-skinned
Brown
Black
Brown
Black

He pointed out that the majority of the blacks who make up 78.1 percent of the population, could aptly be

⁵Ibid., pp. 38-39.

classified as the laborer-peasant class. The middle class blacks are mainly in the professions, in most cases low-paying professions such as teaching, pastoral ministry, nursing, and so on. But members of the upper class, which is mostly composed of whites and fair-skinned Jamaicans, are to be found in managerial positions in commercial businesses and private industry for the most part.⁶ This color-class composition of the Jamaican society is typical of all commonwealth Caribbean States. As is evident, Negroes are in the upper class but their members there do not correspond to their vast numbers in the population. For, the society is structured in the favor of the whites who structured it in colonial times and against blacks, or more specifically against blackness. As a result of this, the average Negro in the West Indies has what the sociologist calls the "white bias."

The sociologist Fernando Henriques points out that every colonial society has a conscious and unconscious ambivalence toward the colonial masters. This takes the form of subservience and imitation on the one hand and hatred and repulsion on the other. However, where the aboriginal culture has been destroyed, as in the West Indies, the attitude of respect and imitation is shown to the colonial master.

Henriques also suggests that where a hybrid population is created through concubinage or marriage, the conflict is intensified by its being on a physical basis. The hybrid

⁶Ibid, pp. 42-43.

is more attracted to the ruling group as it offers him more advantages than the native group. He strives for identity with the white group.

According to Henriques, the West Indian represents a unique phenomenon in the hybrid world. He is ignorant of African culture and despises the little that he knows as primitive and backward. He sees anything black as undesirable for he is striving to appear white in ways and ideas. Hence his constant identification with Europe and things European.⁷

Africans and things African have been so ridiculed and despised by the whites and fair-skinned ruling class that this attitude of the whites had created a sense of inferiority among the blacks. This "white bias" has given rise to the situation where black people have been kept out of jobs while the white and fair-skinned people are given all the opportunities to improve themselves economically and otherwise. The result is that the masses of Jamaican black people are at the lowest rung of the economic ladder.

It is significant that a recent study by Frank McDonald⁸ on Commonwealth Caribbean States confirmed Henriques's research on social structure in Jamaica. After making reference to self-government status achieved by most

⁷Ibid., pp. 42-45.

⁸McDonald, p. 26. Frank McDonald is a fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs, specializing in the emerging states of the Caribbean. He has also been associated with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

of the bigger Caribbean islands, McDonald pointed out that political independence has not greatly affected the traditional colonial class structure of the West Indian society. "In spite of the election of black politicians in every Commonwealth Caribbean state," observes McDonald, "ex-patriots or West Indians of European origin still exercise almost total control over the levers of economic power."

Putting his finger on the correlation between wealth and "whiteness" and poverty and "blackness" in the Caribbean, McDonald says:

At the top are expatriate managers of the economies, those who own and control the major commercial industrial components of the region: the managers of the Tate and Lyle Sugar estates; the managers of Geest's banana industry; the directors of Kaiser, Alcoa, and Reynolds bauxite operations; the managing personnel of various expatriate owned hotels, night clubs and tourist facilities; the hundreds of bank managers for Barclays, Nova Scotia, Royal Bank of Canada and Chase Manhattan.

According to McDonald, the local West Indian elites follow the whites. These are few and generally white. They represent locally the interests of foreign investors. A classic example of this group is Sir Neville Ashenheim in Jamaica. He is the controller of no less than forty-five different corporations or businesses.

Next in privilege are the middle class professionals and technocrats. These are primarily of mixed racial origins and are employed in the middle management positions within the business sector or the Civil Service. This small class is in a dilemma for while acquiring some of the goods and services that come from above, it knows the suffering of the

majority of the population. It is from this group that the leadership for future change must come.

As McDonald points out, about 23,000 skilled workers comprise the next class. They are employed by multi-national corporations such as Kaiser Aluminum in Jamaica, Texaco Oil in Trinidad and Reynolds Metal in Guyana. These workers, totalling two percent of the regional labor force, receive wage and fringe benefits that are equivalent to the average European worker.

The remaining 98 percent of the regional labor force breaks down as follows: "the non-elite, yet fully employed workers numbering approximately 515,000 or 28 percent of the total labor force; the under-employed workers, numbering 900,000 and representing 50 percent of the labor force; and finally, the unemployed that number at least 350,000 and represent 20 percent of the overall labor force of the region."⁹

The suffering West Indians are almost entirely of African or East Indian descent and they account for 90 percent of the population of the Commonwealth Caribbean. Apart from the two percent of industrial workers, the average West Indian earns as little as \$7.11 per week in the smaller states and \$10.14 in the larger ones.

McDonald's penetrating research shows up further inequality in the West Indian society. His research shows that "per capita income of the region (\$145 in the smaller states

⁹Ibid., pp. 133-134.

and \$235 in the larger) does not project the actual inequitable distribution of land, wealth, and other resources that is standard for the area. In Trinidad for example, Tridadians of European origin earn an average income of \$500 per month, when Afro-Trinidadians earn an average wage of only \$104 per month and those of East Indian origin, \$77 per month. Again in Jamaica a recent study completed by the University of the West Indies shows that 5 percent of Jamaica's families accumulate 30 percent of the national goods and services while 60 percent of the families must do with only 19 percent of the country's resources. In Barbados, fifteen large sugar estates own the entire central portion of an island where the density of the population (1,400 per square mile) is one of the highest in the world."¹⁰

It must be noted also that housing and health services are very poor in the West Indies. Two-room homes with twelve inhabitants without piped water nor a sewage system is not uncommon in the West Indies. For instance, in St. Vincent not even Kingstown, the capital city, has a sewage system.

It is not surprising that health services are in short supply in these territories. In a recent study on health service completed in St. Vincent and Jamaica, health services are described as "primitive" with government expenditures averaging only five dollars per person annually.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 135.

Hospitals are over-crowded and antiquated. The whole medical program is geared toward curative rather than preventive measures.¹¹

Frank McDonald's account of the correlation between color and wealth in the Caribbean finds support in statistics taken from two independent sources. The first pertains to the ownership of the means of production and the level of material oppression in Jamaica. These findings are based on a study done by the Social Action Centre in Kingston, Jamaica. The first set of statistics is as follows:

1. Ownership of the means of production

a. Foreign control of the economy

<u>Sectors</u>	<u>% Foreign Ownership</u>
Mining Industry	
(Bauxite & Aluminum)	100
Public Utilities	75
Strategic Manufacturers	
(Rubber, steel, fertilizers)	75
Financial Institutions	64
Transportation	64
Communication & Storage	58
Tourism	57
Sugar Manufacturing (1966)	70

b. Land

The total area of Jamaica is 2.8 million acres. One million acres are uncultivable. One half million acres are owned by bauxite companies. One percent of farms control 56% of the cultivable land area. Seventy-one percent of farms control only 12% of the cultivable land area.

c. Factories

Of the companies operating under the Industrial Incentive laws up to December 1968, 83

¹¹Ibid., p. 136.

were owned by foreigners, 58 were owned by locals, 40 were owned jointly by foreigners and locals.

2. Level of material oppression

a. Income distribution

The top 10% of the households appropriate 43% of the national income. The lowest 60% of households appropriate 19% of national income.

b. Unemployment

Estimates vary between 20% and 30% of labor force--that is, between 150,000 and 225,000 people. Forty percent of the unemployed are in the age group 15-19 years.

c. Per capita food consumption

<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Consumption per head</u>
Beef	1½ lbs/month
Butter	5½ ozs/month
Eggs	3 per month
Fish	3½ lbs/month
Cheese	3 ozs/month

d. Social Welfare-Housing

Seventy-three and one tenth percent of the private dwellings in Jamiaca have pit-latrines. Three out of every 4 dwellings in Jamaica do not have piped water inside or outside. In Trench Town (Western Kingston), of the 4,991 units, only 42 have piped water into the dwelling. At most, one out of every 3 houses has no electricity.¹²

The second series of statistics refer to Trinidad.

These are based on recent University of the West Indies studies carried out by Andrew Camejo.

1. Local Business Elite

a. Racial composition

White	53%
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¹²Michael Campbell-Johnson (ed.) "What Colour Is God's Skin," GISRA, III (March 1972), 5.

Racial composition (continued)

Off-white	24%
Mixed	10%
Indian	9%
African	4%

b. Manner of accedence to position

	Inheritance 30%	Own enterprise & promotion 70%
White	41%	58%
Off-white	38%	16%
Mixed	14%	13%
Indian	7%	9%
African	---	3%

2. Land Ownership

- a. Number and size of holdings Non-Crown lands total about $\frac{1}{2}$ million acres and are divided into about 35,950 holdings distributed as follows:

Size of holdings (acres)	No. of holdings	% of land
1,000 plus	40	25%
100 plus	510	25%
10 plus	9,400	32%
Less than 10	26,000	18%

b. Foreign holdings

Sixty-eight percent of land holdings of 1,000 acres plus is foreign owned. Forty-seven out of 260 holdings of 200 acres plus are foreign owned. In all, about 19% of the total area is foreign owned.¹³

The statistics above throw light on the reason why the black masses of the Caribbean, East Indian and African alike, who account for 90% of the total population of the area, feel they are living in countries they cannot call their own. This state of affairs provides ammunition for Black Power's attack on the traditional holders of wealth and power in the

¹³Ibid.

Caribbean.

C. BLACK POWER AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The Black Power movement of the Caribbean must be seen against the backdrop of the historical deculturization of the two principal ethnic groups (Negroes and East Indians) and their struggle for survival as slaves and indentured laborers on Caribbean plantations.¹⁴

Black Power is not a new ideology on the West Indian scene. It has been indigenous to the region for fifty years. This has been primarily through the influence of the black nationalist Marcus Garvey of Jamaica and C. L. R. James, the pan-Caribbean populist. Both in the U.S. and on the Jamaican scenes in the 1920s, Garvey actively advocated black dignity, black pride, and black economic strength. He taught that "a race with power and authority is a race without respect."¹⁵ With this understanding of power, Garvey tried to organize blacks in Jamaica and the U.S. In the 1950s, James also tried to mobilize a pan-Caribbean nationalism based on economic and political power for the West Indian masses. It is to these two men, particularly, that the Black Power movement owes its inspiration and substance.¹⁶

¹⁴Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁵Rex Nettleford, Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica (Kingston, Jamaica: Collins and Sanster, 1970), p. 118.

¹⁶McDonald, p. 146.

There are two chief aims of Caribbean Black Power: first, the culture of West Indian society must strongly reflect the tradition and customs of the Black majority. Rodney sees this need as "the cultural reconstruction of the black society in the image of the blacks."¹⁷ The second aim is that the resources or wealth of the region must, in a meaningful way, be enjoyed by the black masses. Dr. Omawale of Guyana clearly states Black Power's second goal when he says that "it must also bring about the complete and real rise to [economic] power of the black masses."¹⁸

Regarding the economic salvation of the black masses (Indian and Negroes), Black Power champions think this will never be achieved as long as the West Indies tolerates the exploitation of its resources by North Atlantic metropolises. They suggest that the political leaders of the region "serve the interest of foreign, white capitalist system . . . which ensures that the black man stays at the bottom of the social ladder."¹⁹ Gordon Lewis succinctly expressed Black Power assessment of the Caribbean situation by saying, "In the Caribbean the political face is black and the economic face is white."²⁰ Rodney asserts that this type of relationship between the West Indies and Europe and North America "enriches

¹⁷ Walter Rodney, The Groundings with My Brothers (London: Villers, 1969), p. 28.

¹⁸ Campbell-Johnson, p. 2.

¹⁹ Rodney, p. 19.

²⁰ Campbell-Johnson, p. 2.

the metropolitan countries at the expense of the West Indies, that is, it makes the whites richer and the blacks poorer."²¹

It must be noted that the leaders of the Black Power movement, being highly educated make ample use of studies in economics, sociology and statistical data of the region. There are also other analysts of the Caribbean society who in the main agree with Black Power's chief thesis, that the West Indies has been subject to economic exploitation by multinational corporations. Thus Rex Nettleford suggests that the design of the sugar industry in the West Indies supports Rodney's thesis. Nettleford then cites the Cuban journalist-historian Ramiro Guirra y Sanchez in saying that the design and final goal of the sugar industry is "to produce at minimum cost a basic commodity or luxury article for a distant market at a profit, even though this policy will in the long run ruin the producing country economically, socially, and politically."²² In this connection Clive Thomas in his study of the Caribbean sugar industry calls for the abolition of the plantation system as an answer to the present under-utilization of human and natural resources. He also argues that it is only through diversification and localization of the industry that there would be a halt in the financial drain of repatriated profits.²³ In a subsequent study

²¹Rodney, p. 19.

²²Nettleford, p. 141.

²³McDonald, p. 147.

he suggests that one of the basic aims of the region must be "to wrest control of the main producing sectors from foreign hands in order to control not only the income and employment in these sectors, but to have access to the economic surplus of these sectors which constitute the bulk of the surplus in the region. . . . We must therefore set up our strategy of control through ownership."²⁴

Other analysts see the same type of logic of exploitation working itself through the more recent bauxite industry which produces another basic commodity for the North American market at an immense profit to foreign entrepreneurs. As one analyst puts it, "The instruments of exploitation are still cheap labour and foreign capital in search of profit." This type of arrangement results in loss of land and its attendant evils, loss of liberty and honor.²⁵

The economist Dr. Girvan made a recent study on the Caribbean bauxite industry which is of relevance here. His study points up certain matters with respect to tax and depletion problems. Girvan found evidence that the American aluminum industry has been undervaluing the bauxite they have been mining in Jamaica which resulted in United States companies paying less tax. To be specific, the American plants in Jamaica have been fixing one price on bauxite for the benefit of the Jamaican Government and another, much higher, for

²⁴Campbell-Johnson, p. 2.

²⁵Nettleford, p. 101.

the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. There are figures available which suggest that the American aluminum industry owed Jamaica \$50 million as a result. McDonald made mention of the above and also said that this matter was brought to the attention of Nelson Rockefeller when he visited Jamaica as a part of his Latin American tour.

According to Frank McDonald, the problem is difficult since bauxite is transferred from one branch to another of the same international company. Therefore the producer cannot be taxed in the normal manner of deducing cost from income. In light of this situation, an accounting procedure called "transfer pricing" must therefore be used to determine value. McDonald quotes Girvan that the Jamaican Government at first "naively accepted the corporation's evaluation with the result that while the average price of U.S. aluminum rose by 20% and the value of domestic bauxite by 80%, the price set on imports . . . hardly changed at all."

Girvan is also concerned about bauxite depletion problems. He points out that since the aluminum processing is outside Jamaica, the government has had to encourage the mining of as much as possible for maximizing revenue from taxes. As a result, in Girvan's own words, "Current levels of output with currently known reserves indicate that Jamaica's deposits will be exhausted in 55 years." He then warns that "if the output increases, the reserves will be fully depleted in 24 years." It is significant that this is not a problem to the multinational corporation, for says Girvan: "When reserves

come near exhaustion Kaiser will shift output to Australia and Reynolds will probably shift emphasis to Guyana. Alcoa and Alcan will probably shift to Alumina production in Australia as well. Thus by the end of the present century, the Caribbean could be faced with the prospect of . . . stagnation of its mineral industry and the retrospect of insufficient exploitation of its potential during its existence."²⁶

Frank McDonald thinks as a result of this foreign grip on the Caribbean economy that "the traditional colonial relationship and the consequent material and psychological underdevelopment has not been altered, but rather reinforced."²⁷ In his own words, "As has been the case for three hundred years, the Commonwealth Caribbean is still dependent upon and exploited by North Atlantic metropolis."²⁸

He then points out some of the basic and burning problems in the West Indies. For instance, foreign sugar interests have maintained a traditional control of the best agricultural lands throughout the region so that every Caribbean Government is prevented from carrying out the badly needed land reform and crop diversification. As a result of this baneful situation, the rural population has been confined to one- or two-acre plots of land, while the region continues to import its entire food supply.

²⁶McDonald, p. 149.

²⁷Ibid., p. 26.

²⁸Ibid., p. 139.

It is also pointed out that because the bauxite industry is foreign-gearred and not regional-oriented, the vital economic decisions affecting the uses and processing of bauxite are made in the interest of the foreign companies, rather than the host companies where the bauxite is located. The processing of the bauxite into aluminum is so structured that for every four long tons of bauxite shipped out of the Caribbean, \$893 flow to the United States with it. This situation results in loss of income and employment to the region. For instance, in terms of employment, Jamaica's bauxite industry now employs only 8,000 workers since aluminum is not made on the island. According to McDonald, were the whole process completed in the Caribbean, an additional 42,000 jobs would be available. Therefore in the interest of the Caribbean, the potential of the industry is grossly underutilized.²⁹

The tourist industry, too, is seen by Black Power militants as a "sell-out" of the country by black politicians to the "white devils" of North America.³⁰ This apparently is an extreme view, yet McDonald points out that tourism has contributed nothing to the economic development of the Caribbean. His argument is strengthened by a recent study of Caribbean tourism completed by Zinder Associates in Washington. This study finds that for every \$1 spent in Commonwealth

²⁹Ibid., p. 140.

³⁰Nettleford, p. 140.

Caribbean states, 77¢ returns to the metropolitan centers. Much of the remaining 23¢ is spent on advertisement and imported foods to meet tourists' tastes.

In some of the small islands like Barbados and St. Kitts, where sugar is being produced in the interior flatlands of the island, the islanders must make the best of a narrow strip between the tourist dominated shore and the estate-owned interior. Hence the beaches have become playgrounds for the whites only, while the indigenous population is forced to move to the cheaper terrain.

North American influence on land development in the Caribbean has been an economic disaster to the islanders. According to McDonald, "Hundreds of foreign real estate developers have made fortunes by buying up most of the land available then selling to eager North Americans looking for a tropical paradise." The result is retirement homes and land schemes which are nothing but luxury white ghettos.³¹

The economic factors presented in this chapter are also important because they bring into sharp focus the reasons for Black Power protests. They point to vexing economic problems which ought to engage the energies of the Church. For if the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be meaningful in the Caribbean, it must liberate man from the chains of economic colonization.

³¹McDonald, p. 140.

1. Black Culture

After depicting the material poverty of the Caribbean, Frank McDonald insightfully deals with poverty of spirit among West Indians in the following statement:

Yet worse than the material poverty of the region is the state of mind of its inhabitants. The effects of three hundred years of colonization and its continuation in other forms today have conditioned large sectors of the population to believe that there is no other way to live, that the objective of each day is to endure until the next, to scrape together enough to survive. And to survive the villager of the Caribbean has conditioned himself to be submissive--at least on the surface--so as not to incur the displeasure of the manager of the hotel, the white tourists on the beach or the proprietor of the local industry. As a result, particularly among the older men of the region, there is an apathy bordering on despair, a lack of energy that the elites of the Caribbean attribute to racial or cultural characteristics rather than the black man's own realization that what work there is to be done each day does not benefit "we," but only "they."³²

Walter Rodney, the leading spokesman on Black Power in the Caribbean, also points out that the economic servitude in the region has adversely affected the thinking of black West Indians. Rodney asserts that whites have dominated West Indians both physically and mentally. This brainwashing process has been so effective that it has convinced so many black people of their inferiority. In concrete terms Rodney spells out the brainwashing process.

The adult black in our West Indian society is fully conditioned to thinking white, because that is the training we are given from childhood. The little black girl plays with a white doll, identifying with it as she combs its flaxen hair. Asked to sketch the figure of a man or

³²

Ibid., p. 137.

woman, the black schoolboy instinctively produces a white man or a white woman. This is not surprising, since until recently the illustrations in our text books were all figures of Europeans. The few changes which have taken place have barely scratched the surface of the problem. West Indians of every colour still aspire to European standards of dress and beauty. The language which is used by black people in describing ourselves shows how we despise our African appearance. "Good hair" means European hair, "good nose" means a straight nose, "good complexion" means a light complexion. Everybody recognises how incongruous and ridiculous such terms are but we continue to use them and to express our support of the assumption that white Europeans have the monopoly of beauty, and that black is the incarnation of ugliness. That is why Black Power advocates find it necessary to assert that BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL.³³

Rodney then accuses the foreign-controlled media of communication and a white-values-ridden educational system as strong propagators of this brainwashing.

Through the manipulation of this media of education and communication, white people have produced black people who administer the system and perpetuate the white values--"white hearted black men," as they are called by conscious elements. This is as true of the Indians as it is true of the Africans in our West Indian society. Indeed the basic explanation of the tragedy of African/Indian confrontation in Guyana and Trinidad is the fact that both groups are held captive by European ways of seeing things. . . . It is as though no black man can see another black man except by looking through a white person.³⁴

2. Black Power and Church Symbols

The Church as a shaper of thought and culture comes under the fire of Black Power attack. In this connection, Walter Rodney says:

³³Rodney, p. 32.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 33-34.

The most profound revelation of the sickness of our society on the question of race is our respect for all the white symbols of the Christian religion. God the Father is white, God the Son is white, and presumably God the Holy Ghost is white also. The disciples and the saints are white, all the Cherubim and Seraphim and angels are white--except Lucifer, of course, who was black, being the embodiment of evil. When one calls upon black people to reject these things, this is not an attack on the teachings of Christ or the ideals of Christianity. What we have to ask is "Why should Christianity come to us all wrapped in white?" The white race constitute about 20 percent of the world's population, yet non-white peoples are supposed to accept that all who inhabit the heavens are white. . . .

Rodney then strikes a note which lends itself to simple logic and practical adaptation in saying

There is absolutely no reason why different racial groups should not provide themselves with their own religious symbols. A picture of Christ could be red, white or black, depending on the people who are involved.

He concludes his argument with: "When Africans adopt the European concept that purity and goodness must be painted white and all that is evil and damned is to be painted black then we are flagrantly self-insulting."³⁵

According to Campbell-Johnson, editor of GISRA, the greatest shock to the Churches and religious sensitivities of the Caribbean peoples came when Black Power leaders in Trinidad invaded the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Port of Spain chanting "God is black" and placing a 'Freedom Now' placard on St. Peter's statue. Of significance is the commentary of Ratoon, the Black Power Guyana-based paper. Johnson cites Ratoon's commentary on the incident:

³⁵Ibid., p. 33.

The established Church in Trinidad helped to reinforce white and off-white economic privilege and provide moral justification for imperialism. . . . Historically, the Church in Trinidad has been slow to clean up the racism and prejudice within its own walls. Conscious black nuns are still telling tales of the race and colour discrimination within Trinidad convents. For the Church is the most guilty of destroying black consciousness in the Caribbean by preaching submission to inhuman conditions, it killed the spirit of rebellion in the majority of black people and taught them to accept and rationalise their slavery--at times even to idealise it.

This paper continues:

Blacks surrendered their manhood, dignity and character. It was a terrible price to pay for even the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. The church in the West Indies cannot escape from the guilt.

The Ratoon article ends with these words:

When they placed the 'Freedom Now' placard in the white, useless, marble hand of St. Peter's statue, the demonstrators were telling the church that it is high time its members stop being white marble statues and really started doing something to liberate conscience in this hard-boiled city.³⁶

The above statements may be a mixture of truth and exaggerated half-truths, but they surely point to how the church with its trappings of whiteness is viewed by a long-oppressed black Caribbean people.

Being conscious of the three hundred years of brainwashing and submission inflicted on West Indians, Black Power thinks that cultural independence will come from a radical break with the Europeanized view of West Indians. In Rodney's own words, "It is time we started seeing through our own eyes. The road to Black Power here in the West Indies and elsewhere must begin with a re-valuation of ourselves as blacks and

³⁶Campbell-Johnson, p. 8.

with a re-definition of the world from our own standpoint." In Rodney's eyes this cannot be achieved until West Indians rid themselves of "white cultural imperialism."³⁷

For Black Power leaders, a reevaluation of ourselves and an acceptance of Afro-West Indian culture must come from the study of African history. Rodney (who possesses the Doctor of Philosophy degree from London University in African History) suggests that Africans in the New World have been deliberately kept ignorant of African achievements by whites for centuries. He thinks it is a calculated plan of the whites to present a picture of a barbarous Africa so that Western blacks would be ashamed to identify with Africa. In support of this statement he asserts: "In the West Indies names like 'Bungo' and 'Quashie', which refer to Africans, are names which most black people hate, and our knowledge of Africa came from reading Tarzan comic books."³⁸

It is of significance that on the question of African history Rex Nettleford (the Jamaican Rhodes Scholar and brilliant analyst of West Indian society) concurs with Rodney. Nettleford asserts that the European pre-bondage picture of Africa is a distortion of the facts of history. The African is pictured as living in squalor, and driven by unbridled passions, lacking in a sense of personal security and with a life devoid of compassion and reason. The African is said to

³⁷Rodney, pp. 32-33.

³⁸Ibid., p. 35.

have lived like the proverbial beast without moral awareness and to have relied entirely on force for his self-preservation. Hence the Europeans were justified in encaging him in slavery for a period of so-called taming. Contrary to this view, Walter Rodney and Rex Nettleford pointed out that some pre-bondage African countries had sophisticated civilizations. According to Nettleford:

There were early Sudanic empires--complex in organization and enveloping wide expanses of territory. The Benin bronzes are the essence of creativity, craftsmanship, and sophistication, it is yet to be proven that these were the work of the Portuguese. Nor were the brilliant Ife Heads the creation of Egyptians as some Europeans would have it. The Zambadwe ruins of Central Africa betray townships, civilizations, and capacities for sophisticated social organization and Nkrumah's claims of an earlier kingdom of Ghana when Europeans were slaughtering each other are all now documented and accepted as major contributions of human history.

Nettleford then quotes the West African historian K. O. Dike:

Many statements on Africa rested not on the evidence of history or ascertained fact but on pre-conceived notions which in other contexts the scholars responsible would dismiss with appropriate academic detachment.³⁹

How do West Indians see the Black Power movement?

To the traditional holders of power, Black Power is a diabolical movement that seeks to disrupt the order of the West Indian society. The man of the street is torn between the middle class version of Black Power and the protests of Black Power that are mirrored in his day-to-day experience. Whatever are the varied views of Black Power, its presence has made a lasting impact for the good on the West Indies.

³⁹ Nettleford, pp. 52-53.

D. CHURCHMEN ASSESS BLACK POWER

Also of interest to this paper is the Church's posture on Black Power in the West Indies. In its early stages, most of the churches denounced the Black Power movement. This was due partly to the "white bias" in the ex-colonial society and partly to a misunderstanding of the real motives of Black Power. However, presently, a more sensitive and responsible posture is being taken by important voices in the West Indian Church. For instance, the Roman Catholic bishops of the Antilles have expressed their willingness and intention to seek out and vigorously promote the good in the Black Power movement. They also pointed out the contribution of clerics in the cause of racial equality. In their own words, "In fact it might be said that it was the work of dedicated men which created the climate in which the nobler aspirations of the movement might be realized."⁴⁰

From the ranks of the Protestants came even bolder statements. Thus Ashley Smith, the ex-moderator of the United Church of Jamaica and Grand Cayman declared:

The Black Power protest like the Hebrew revolution led by Moses . . . is yet another unmistakable evidence of the inevitability of the victory of God's grace in all situations. It provides support for the assumption that man may hold back the manifestation of God's victory in particular historical situations, but is ultimately incapable of frustrating God's plan for his world.

Smith thinks the Church cannot take credit for awakening the oppressed black people of the Caribbean, but it

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 131.

must recognize that Black Power is the work of the Gospel. In this connection he asserts: "The genuine Black Power advocate is only responding to what he has heard concerning the Fatherhood of God and the equality of God's children." Smith then laments that the expatriates and majority of the middle class natives refuse "to see God's hand in whatever is happening and his Kingdom taking shape in the midst of chaos."⁴¹

Smith sees Black Power as a liberating force and therefore represents for the black man a "renunciation of an 'it' status and the assumption of a divinely endowed 'Thou' status in relation to God and the brother who has conspired to depersonalize him, and himself."⁴²

The best movements in the history of our world have not been without faults. Consequently the Black Power movement has its share of weaknesses. But to understand Black Power, one must see this movement in light of slavery and colonization in the Caribbean. Thus Nettleford's assessment of Black Power clearly expresses this writer's posture on Black Power:

Values born exclusively of European experience and long embraced with indiscriminating fervour can no longer maintain their accustomed position of eminence. And though not all that is black can be regarded as beautiful it is to be doubted that an entire moral system can

⁴¹Ashley Smith, "The Religious Significance of Black Power in Caribbean Churches" in Idris Hamis (ed.) Troubling of the Waters (San Fernando: Rahaman Printery, 1973), p. 96.

⁴²Ibid., p. 94.

ever again be based on notions of goodness that is white and evil that is black.⁴³

In the conclusion of this chapter, it must be said that the problems that the Independent Caribbean inherited are legion and complex. The respective national governments are all grappling with these vexing problems. The governments are trying to accomplish this by social legislation, by re-negotiating contracts with conglomerates operating in their territories, thus providing more revenue and jobs for their people; they are fostering a regional and cultural consciousness among the people of the Caribbean. A Caribbean identity is therefore being created. What is highly necessary now in the West Indies is for other popular-based institutions like the Church to lend their influence to the eradication of Classism, economic exploitation, and cultural imperialism in the Caribbean.

Up to this point the Black Power movement has been the only strong voice to call for a reformation of the West Indian society in the above-mentioned areas. The Church with all its resources--Biblical, moral and ethical--is quiescent on these galling issues. In fact, the work that Black Power has been doing, the Church should have been doing if it were faithful to its Master who came "to preach deliverance to the captives . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

If the West Indian society is to succeed in its

⁴³Nettleford, p. 222.

fight with classism and its attendant evils, the Church will have to play an active role in this matter. As Jesus fought against the religious bigotry of the Pharisees of his day, so the Church should follow its master in denouncing color-class and all forms of classism that are rife in the West Indian society.

How can the Christian church which embraces the Old Testament as a part of its Scripture remain quiescent when the poor in its midst are oppressed? Has the church forgotten that one of the Old Testament motifs (if not the chief one) is justice (for all). The church must use its resources--Old Testament, New Testament and others--to liberate its people from the lingering chains of colonialism.

Unfortunately, the shady operations of multi-national corporations in the Caribbean go unrebuked by the world Church, and even by the West Indian Church. These North American-based companies thrive on the religious conservatism of the Caribbean people. In this connection, Ronald Stone quotes a highly-placed officer of the Aluminum Company of America as saying, "The radicalism of the Peoples National Party [a political party in Jamaica] is limited by the conservative religious traditions in Jamaica."⁴⁴ It is unfortunate that religion in the Caribbean reinforces the status quo and fosters escapism. But religion has the potential to liberate a people from oppression and servile conservatism

⁴⁴Ronald Stone, "A Black Liberation Theology from Jamaica," Christian Century, Vol. XCI, (July 1974), 750.

so that they can see that God intends that they enjoy the resources of their land here and now. What the ALCO executive needs to know is that religion "is not essentially conservative" and that if the religious substructure of Jamaican ideology shifts, the ensuing earthquake may topple even the bauxite lords."⁴⁵ Certainly the teaching of the Church must shake and shape West Indian bauxite industry's policies to benefit the people who own the bauxite. And surely the Church should help in the realization of this just endeavor.

Thus from this study it can be seen that if the Church in the West Indies does not shed its colonial conservatism it will become meaningless in a society racked with social ferment. Therefore, the Church in the West Indies can only be meaningful when it begins to reflect West Indian culture and theological perspectives.

E. SUMMARY

The West Indian states, although independent, are still struggling with the "fall out" of colonialism. The racial inferiority instilled in black West Indians by European colonists still plagues the Caribbean. The down-grading of things African and the praising of things European have given rise to what the sociologist calls "the white bias" in the West Indian society.

⁴⁵Ibid.

The West Indies has been the victim of a foreign-operated industrial system which has no interest in the country where its industries are operating. Its only interest is profit. These were aims of the foreign-owned sugar and banana industries. Such also is the present interest of the North American-owned bauxite and petroleum industries in the West Indies. Since the 1950s these above-mentioned maladies of West Indian society have come under the severe attack of black nationalists, social analysts, and recently, Black Power advocates. In this atmosphere of ferment the traditional conservative stance of the Church in the region is being questioned. For the Church traditionally allies itself with the holders of wealth and power and preaches a gospel of "don't rock the boat" to the poor.

However, there are now voices in the Church that are hearing the cries of the poor and down-trodden in the society. And these voices are growing into a crescendo. Thus Ashley Smith, an ex-moderator of the United Church of Jamaica and Grand Cayman, speaks of the Black Power Movement as the voice of God.

In this atmosphere of social protest, statistical revelations of the ills of the society from academia, the active participation of strong voices in the Church to liberate the society, the West Indian society can never be the same. But the Christian Church must play a greater role in the creation of a just West Indian society based, not on European standards, but on West Indian ethos.

CHAPTER IV

AFRO-WEST INDIAN RELIGIOUS VOICES

New World blacks have always been fighting the white-oriented establishment to preserve their sense of identity with Africa. The slaves in the West Indies sought to make a bridge with Africa through revolt, suicide, and religion. But under the circumstances of slavery it was mainly through the slaves' religion that a spiritual and cultural link was maintained with Africa. Religion served as a tangible link between them and their gods, between them and their kinsmen, living and dead.

There was only one place the slaves had freedom--namely in their nocturnal meetings. When they communed with their God and with their ancestral spirits, they realized a freedom which was not theirs in the work-a-day world of a West Indian plantation system. But the slaves did more than communing with God and ancestral spirits. In these meetings they were planning the destruction of the slave system.

The very act of holding these meetings showed their protest against European religion and culture. And through these meetings the African culture has been preserved in the West Indies. It is therefore the intent of this chapter to show that these Afro-West Indian cults were liberation movements. For they were consciously freeing the spirit of the

West Indian man from European domination.

Thus in the eighteenth century when Christianity was introduced to the slaves and their descendants in the United States and the West Indies, these blacks did not abandon their African religions but added certain elements of the new religion to their African religions. This produced a religious syncretism which Roger Bastide aptly calls the "marriage of religions."¹ The wisdom of the Africans to hold Christianity in coexistence with African religions has resulted in the survival of African religions in the New World and, particularly, in the West Indies.

As the slaves in the West Indies represented different African countries and religions, the African religions differ from island to island. But they all have certain common elements that make them African. This study will deal only with the Shango in Trinidad; the Pocomania, Zion Revival, and Rastafarian in Jamaica; and some aspects of Voodoo in Haiti.

A. SHANGO IN TRINIDAD

The Shango cult of Trinidad developed during the nineteenth century as people of African descent, mainly the Yorubas, combined African traditional tribal beliefs and practices with Christianity. In particular, its Christian elements came from Catholicism and the Baptist faith. In its theology and ritual, it has close resemblance to Afro-Christian cults in

¹Roger Bastide, African Civilizations in the New World (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 153.

Haiti (Voodoo), Cuba (Santeria), and Brazil (Xango).²

1. History

There is no organized history of Shango, but historical letters provide some data on some aspects of this magico-religious group. George Simpson gives a report of Shango by Charles D. Day who lived in Trinidad in 1852. Day spoke of nightly meetings held by Negroes from 7 p.m. until daybreak next morning. In these meetings there were singing and clapping of hands accompanied by the beating of drums, and the shaking of a "shock-shock" (a little calabash filled with peas). To this music the Negroes danced with exuberance.

In 1871 Kingley also described a scene of an African-type ceremony in Trinidad:

The hut was lighted by some eight or ten candles or lamps, and in the centre, dimly visible, was a Fetish somewhat of the appearance of a man, but with the head of a cock. Everything that the coarsest fancy could invent had been done to make this image horrible; yet it appeared the object of special adoration to the devotees assembled.

He referred to the dance that followed and called the whole ceremony a "sorcerer's sabbath."³

These above-mentioned statements suggest that from the mid-nineteenth century, Trinidadian Negroes were having African drumming ceremonies late at night. These accounts also

²George Simpson, Religious Cults of the Caribbean (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1965), pp. 11-12.

³Ibid., pp. 13-14.

point to the prejudice with which Englishmen viewed the African cult.

2. Belief System

Gods. Both in Trinidad and Nigeria the Shango cultists believe in a high God.⁴ In Trinidad Shango is one of dozens of "powers;" among them are fourteen Yoruba (a Nigerian tribe) dieties. These function as intermediaries between the high God and the peoples of earth. A discussion of other divinities will not serve this study's purpose and thus its attention will be confined to Shango.

Shango, in Yoruba, means god of thunder and lightning.⁵ In addition to the belief in the high God and many divinities, Shango beliefs span Africa and Europe. The following are some of the salient features of the Shango belief system:

1. Evil powers have influence on living persons.
2. The shadow of the dead remains after one's death.
3. Sins and taboos are obstacles to communication with Shango.
4. Spirit-possession is an evidence of one's calling to work for Shango.⁶

In Shango rituals, one can see syncretism at work.

⁴John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 99.

⁵Simpson, p. 20.

⁶Ibid., pp. 22-28.

Here African thunderstone, animal sacrifice, drums and dance are mixed with European Baptist-type prayer and Roman Catholic candles, cross and crucifixes.⁷

The Shango leaders are hailed as healers and conjurers. The Healers use of baths, herbs and ointments and the Conjurers counsel for important undertakings are vital and significant services rendered to the Shango believers of lower class Trinidadians.⁸

3. Attitude toward Shangoism

Trinidad government laws dating back to 1921 prohibit certain aspects of Shangoism, specifically the "bongo" dance accompanied by "Chac-Chac." However, despite these prohibitive laws of the 1920s, Shango thrives among lower class Trinidadian blacks.⁹

4. Functions of Shango

Sociologists of religion suggest that Shango practices serve the underprivileged blacks as "substitutes for satisfaction denied them in the realm of economics, politics, and aesthetics as well as esteem and recognition [that can] be obtained in the cult life."¹⁰

⁷Ibid., p. 105.

⁸Ibid., pp. 26-28.

⁹Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 108.

Granted that this statement is partly true, it is still a simplistic treatment of a complex matter. In Shango, its drumming, its type of dancing, its sacred objects all bespeak a culture and a religion foreign to the New World and Europe. The early Shangoists, by practicing their own religion in their cultural manner were saying to the white man and Christianity, "We had a way of life before you brought us here and we will continue in this tradition." Therefore, Shangoism was an affirmation of the African way of life and a protest of the white man's way of life.

B. ZION REVIVAL AND POCOMANIA IN JAMAICA

The Jamaican Zion Revival and Pocomania cults, like Shango, are an amalgam of European Christianity and West African polytheism. To be specific, Zion Revival is a fundamentalist Protestant cult with African coloring. On the other hand, Pocomania is steeped in West Africa's ancestral worship with Christian overtones.¹¹

1. Origin

The origin of these cults is somewhat obscure. However, there is much justification for the argument that Zion Revival and Pocomania came out of the non-conformists' religious ferment of 1860-1861 in Jamaica. According to the editor of Religion in Jamaica, these cults show similarities

¹¹Ibid., p. 157.

to the Baptist Classes of the pre-emancipation era. It is supposed that these cults have their antecedent in these Baptist classes. For the cults assumed many of their distinctive characteristics during the Great Revival Movement. Most of the cults' members trace their origin to this movement and call themselves '60' or '61' revivalists.¹²

According to Religion in Jamaica, "the Great Revival itself died out in 1862 but stimulated the formation of numerous independent revivalist bands which survived it. These groups apparently developed Zion Revivalism, while more deviant bands which resisted such influences, evolved as the Pocomania cult."¹³

2. Belief System

The belief systems of these cults are basically the same. This is not surprising for both had a common origin, namely, the 1860 Baptist Revival. The differences between these cults are to be found in the performance of their ceremonies. Nevertheless, this study will not deal with these minor differences. The chief elements of their beliefs can be summed up as follows:

1. the belief in a hierarchy of spirits, or beings, with God the Creator at the top of this hierarchy. Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the angels, prophets, disciples, and

¹²Religion in Jamaica (Kingston: Jamaica Information Service, 1972), p. 10.

¹³Ibid., p. 10.

the spirits of their 'great' dead come next in this order of importance.

2. spirit-possession as a sign of the cultist's calling and acceptance by the spirits

3. the idea that the dead have power to aid or harm

4. the use of the Bible as a charm and for other ritual purposes

5. leaves, 'sacred stones', water, and blood considered as elements through which the cultists communicate with the spirits

6. Obeah or magic which can heal or harm.¹⁴

As in the case of Shango, Jamaican cults reflect the mixture of African and European religions and cultures. For instance, the polytheistic concept of God, the public nature of spirit-possession, the use of drums and rattles, the emphasis on rhythms and polyrhythms, the sacred stones and leaves are all African retentions. But it must be pointed out that these have undergone changes through their contact with Christianity in the New World.¹⁵

3. Four Important Elements Common to Jamaican Cults

a. Drums and drumming. Music is indispensable to Afro-Creole religious ceremonies in Jamaica. The most important instrument is the drum. The drum is made of the skin

¹⁴Simpson, pp. 169-172.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 198.

of a goat which has been killed in a previous sacrificial ceremony. It is through the act of the drummer that adherents of Cumina and Pocomania learned to invoke the spirits. Hence, drumming is the gateway to communication with spirits.

b. Dance. To show the importance of dance in the Jamaica cults, dancing in the revival cults and Cumina (another Afro-Jamaican cult) is described here. The dance peculiar to the Revival cults is called "trumping." It is done counterclockwise around the altar which is in the center of a ring and has the appearance of a forward moving step-by-step stomp. The body is bent forward from the waist and the breath is exhaled or inhaled with great effort and sound. This sound is referred to as "laboring" or groaning.

It is significant to know that most of these ceremonies are accompanied by dancing. In the Cumina cult there are two main kinds of dancing: (1) the basic African dance participated in by everyone in a ring (these dances are conducted at a memorial or entombment) and (2) the Myal dance which is used by the spirit-possessed person.

Simpson has rightly observed that:

There is no question that the dances are religious in character. Sex offenses are not observed in ceremonials; to perform a sexual act during a Cumina is to show disrespect toward the ancestral Zombies and one's own family. What appears to the outsider as movements suggestive of sexual acts are performed by old men and women, young people and even children without any of the implications the North American would ascribe to them. Because the cultural attitude of these people toward sex is not furtive, therefore bodily motions, regardless of their specific character, are meant to be regarded with underlying implications and are accepted as part of the

variety of dance movement.¹⁶

c. Songs. There are three types of songs used by these traditional African groups. They are: Folk songs sung at ring plays which are in Jamaican dialect; Bilah folk songs sung at Cumina for calling down spirits; and Myal songs whose use is restricted to spirit possession at Cumina.¹⁷ These songs and Sankey hymns are mutually respected by people of African descent in Jamaica. With reference to singing, Beckwith describes a Revival meeting thus: "A Sankey is sung to the beat of a drum; after a bit it fell into dizzying repetition of a set of phrases over and over again while the audience and the workers rock to the rhythm."¹⁸

d. Sacrifice. In Jamaican cults, sacrifices are made on special occasions. Among the Revivalists, the principal occasions for the offering of sacrifices to the spirits are (1) the annual sacrifice ceremony in honor of all the deceased members of a band, (2) a special type of "uplifting" table, and (3) Nine Nights rites. At some of the latter ceremonies, unsalted rice and rum are thrown "all over the place to feed the dead."¹⁹

¹⁶Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁸Martha Beckwith, Black Roadways (Charlottesville: University of North Carolina Press, 1929), p. 161.

¹⁹Simpson, pp. 177-178.

4. Organization of Cults

The hierarchy found in the Yoruba priestly organization is reflected in the organization of Zion Revival and Pocomania cults.²⁰

a. Revival. The highest ranking officer in the Revival is called Father. This office is attained by an experienced, crowned shepherd. He alone can preside at a meeting of many independent heads of Revivalists.

In a regular ranking of officers, the crowned Shepherd is the highest, followed by seven divisions of rank symbolizing seven different callings as described in Revelation. These divisions represent various duties that must be done in a Revivalist ceremony. The following are the various kinds of Shepherds: (1) the Wheeling Shepherd, (2) the Rambling Shepherd, (3) the Warrior Shepherd, (4) the Hunting Shepherd, (5) the Spying Shepherd, (6) the Cutting Shepherd, and (7) the Water Shepherd. These Officers have their female counterparts.²¹

b. Pocomania. The Pocomania leaders are called "governors" or "shepherds." Each shepherd has a woman who works with him--not his wife--as his confederate called "governess" or "shepherdess." Both of them speak in codes or what they call unknown tongues given to them by God.²²

²⁰Bastide, p. 118.

²¹Simpson, pp. 193-195.

²²Beckwith, p. 176.

5. Attitude toward Pocomania and Zion Revival

Jamaican middle and upper class people have always derided these cults. As has been pointed out, the Jamaican society has a "white bias." Consequently, it rejected these cults which mirrored much of African religion and culture. In fact, the whole nativistic tradition in Jamaica was the subject of contempt and scorn by some of the established churches. Yet to the black masses, these Afro-Creole cults had meaning for their existence.²³

C. FUNCTIONS OF AFRO-WEST INDIAN CULTS

1. Worship and Community

Again, to the social scientist, the function of these cults is mainly social. Simpson thinks these cults contribute to the social order "by providing supernatural sanctions for mores, including taboos on deceitfulness, lying, stealing . . . and fornication." He continues, "Pocomania and Revival Zion . . . provide emotional release from the frustrations which go with the subordinate status of lower class people." To him, these cult ceremonies "offer many possibilities for ego gratification through singing, drumming, dancing, and office-holding."²⁴

While the sociological functions of these cults must

²³S. Goodridge, Politics and the Caribbean Church (Bridgetown, Barbados: CADC, 1973), p. 14.

²⁴Mbiti, p. 2.

not be minimized, it seems rather superficial and one-sided a view to think of the Afro-West Indian cults in only sociological terms. What Simpson and others have said regarding the function of these cults, can be said about the most sophisticated groups in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

To ascertain the function of these cults, it is vitally important to discover what these African religions meant to the slaves and their early descendants. It is a well-known fact that no people on this planet are more religious than Africans. Worship and ritual are a way of life in Africa.²⁵ Therefore in trying to ascertain the functions of these religions a people's religious impulses and tendencies should be looked at.

If, under normal situations in Africa, worship is a way of life, it follows that a people who experienced the trauma of being brutally uprooted from their villages and country and taken to a strange land with strange customs would want to find out from their God--the High God--the reason for all this. John Mbiti says of the Yoruba tribe (one of the chief African tribes who peopled the West Indies) that "God is seen as all wise, all powerful, and 'sees both the inside and outside of a man'."²⁶ Such concepts of God must have driven the Yoruba slaves to their God to question "Why, why all the suffering?" Hence, it should be said that

²⁵Ibid., p. 35.

²⁶Ibid., p. 39.

the basic function of these meetings, which Englishmen despised and spoke of in contempt, was for the communication with their God and divinities.

The white man thought these African religions were superstitions because they were not carried out in European forms. For instance, the concepts of African religions were not written as such. But Europeans were mistaken in their assessment, for even today religious concept, by and large, is not written in Africa. In the words of Mbiti, "Religion in African societies is not written on paper, but in his people's hearts, minds, oral history, rituals and religious personages like the priests, rainmakers, officiating elders and even kings." Europeans were measuring these religions by only one standard--European.

When we consider the function of these Afro-West Indian religions, it must be observed that only the slaves' religion made sense to them. Christianity just did not make sense to these suffering slaves. For in traditional African religions no formal distinction is made between the sacred and secular, as is made in Christianity. Wherever the African is, there is religion; and his religion is taken in every department of his life and community. Therefore, it was impossible for the slaves and their descendants to understand the white man's religion that was only operative in a building called "Church" once weekly.²⁷

²⁷Ibid., pp. 2-3.

These cult meetings in the West Indies united these Africans in a community which is an integral part of the African life. As Mbiti has observed, "Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his community, of which he is a part." He continues,

To be human is to belong to the whole community and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships, and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. . . . Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society, and African people do not know how to exist without religion.²⁸

The last sentence of the above-mentioned statement speaks volumes in explaining the functions of Afro-West Indian religions.

2. Liberation

However, it is now a recognized fact that the slaves' meetings were not only satisfying religious impulses, as some thought, but were planning sessions to throw off the yoke of slavery. They were liberation meetings, and their theology was "liberation" theology. Thus it was in these meetings of "drumming and dancing" that the groundwork was laid for the rebellion of the Cromantees in Jamaica in 1760 and 1832, and also the rebellion of the Ashanti Negroes from the Gold Coast in 1766. It was these meetings that gave the Maroons

²⁸Ibid., p. 168.

of Jamaica the inspiration and strength to fight the British successfully for fifteen years (1725-1740).²⁹

The respective colonial governments of the West Indies did not fail to see the strength and potential power for political activism which emanated from these groups. Consequently, "the statute books of the West Indian territories bear ample evidence of the varied laws and ordinances designed to subdue the derided African forms in Caribbean religious expression, and even more important, to offset the potential for political action which might arise from religious fervour."³⁰

3. Voodoo as Political Liberation

In this connection, the Voodoo of Haiti in the mid-eighteenth century provides a classic example of the part played by Afro-West Indian cults in the struggle for the freedom of Afro-West Indians. Thus Michael Laguerre sees the "rise of Voodoo [as] the expression of the will of the slaves to maintain the values of negritude."

Voodoo played a most important role in the slave community in that it inspired a hope for the victory of the slave's religion over that of his master's, thereby resulting in complete liberation. The slaves were forced to worship like the white man, but that surface worship helped to hide

²⁹ Samuel Hurwitz and Edith Hurwitz, Jamaica (London: Praeger, 1971), p. 75.

³⁰ Goodrich, p. 14.

the real purpose of their Voodoo.

What the colonists saw as "erotic and indecent Negro dances served both as a worship of their Spirit Loas and a planning session to destroy the whites and their slave system. These meetings were summoned by the resounding sounds of the drums. There, Maroon leaders in the name of Loas instilled in the slaves the power to sabotage the plantations, poison the cattle, and hate the colonists.³¹

Although the colonial administration of Haiti discovered the intent of the Voodoo meetings and forbade them, the slaves found time and place to hold these meetings. Laguerre quotes Jan (a Haitian historian): "The more the slave owners suppressed and punished the dancers, the dearer, the more sacred did they become to the slaves. The prohibition forced them to secrecy."

The attack on Voodoo galvanized the slaves in a common cause--the destruction of the whites and slavery. In the words of Jan, cited by Laguerre, "Their religion became a secret cult, the faithful became sworn brothers, their secret meetings became the cell of resistance. It needed only an efficient ringleader to drive their angered spirits to rebellion."

This leader was found in Boukam who was an overseer on one of the Haitian slave plantations. Boukam used his influence to rally slaves in these Voodoo meetings and inspired

³¹Michael Laguerre, "Voodoo as Religious and Revolutionary Ideology," Freeing the Spirit, III (Spring 1974), 23-24.

them to destroy the whites as the only means of freedom.

After months of planning, he called a general meeting on August 14, 1744. The sole purpose was to destroy all the whites and their possessions. It is of significance that the whole plan was put under the supervision of the Voodoo spirit, Loas. According to Laguerre, "By coming to supplicate the Voodoo before the opening struggle the slaves continued an old African tradition. Voodoo Loas was asked not only to increase their strength tenfold, but also to cover their enemies with all sorts of sores."

In this pact each person pledged support and loyalty to the cause in the name of Loas. To seal this pledge the blood of a pig was drunk by each person there. During the ceremony, before the mission was launched to exterminate the colonists, Boukam offered the following prayer to the God of his ancestors:

The God who created the sun which gives light, who
rouses the waves and rules the storm, though hidden
in the clouds, he watches us.
He sees all that the white man does.
The God of the white man inspires him with crime.
But our God calls us to do good works.
Our God who is good to us orders us to revenge our wrongs.
He will direct our arms and aid us.
Throw away the symbols of the God of the white.
Who has so often caused us to weep,
And listen to the voice of liberty,
Which speaks in the hearts of us all.

Everything was done in the name of Loas. Thus at the end of the ceremony, Boukam told the assembly that Voodoo Loas agreed to his plan. His words are repeated by Ignace, the captured slave:

Time of vengeance comes: tomorrow in the night all the whites must be killed. . . . No more delay, no more fear, the universality of the conjuration does not leave any refuge, any hope of salvation for the whites. All will be under the same lot; and if some of them avoid our poniards, they will not escape the activity of the fire that goes to reduce the plains in the cinders.³²

Their plan met with great success save for one area in which they were driven off. On August 24, 1791, Boukam and his people wrote the Governor of Haiti the following letter:

"It is too late. God . . . that struggles for the innocent is our guide. He will never abandon us. So here is our motto: 'To vanquish or to perish.'"

Voodoo thus played a great part in Haitian Independence. Haitian historians have pointed out that in the war of independence the slaves came into the fray with all types of Voodoo guards. The leaders of the slaves claimed to be prophets of Voodoo, whose bodies were said to be invulnerable to bullets. Their people fought along with them in the strength of Voodoo. Furthermore, the slaves' leaders told them that if they died fighting the French, they would unite with their kinfolk in Africa. They believed; and as a result, fought fearlessly.³³

Laguette cites the report of Drouin de Bracy which told of the refrain the slaves sang during their initiation rites:

We swear to destroy the whites
And all that they possess

³²Ibid, p. 26.

³³Ibid., p. 27.

Let us die
Rather than fail to keep this vow.

For the slaves, Voodoo was the expression of a resistance to cultural and religious oppression. It allowed the slaves to recognize that their values were different from that of the whites, and thereby enabled them to express their negritude. This cult comprised the center of black values in its opposition to white values.

One cannot conceive of a Haitian independence without the seed of the revolution that made for the independence--namely Voodoo. In the words of Laguerre, "The singularity of the revolution of Haiti rests in part, in the religious ardor of the slaves, inflamed by the leaders, who in turn were inspired by Voodoo Loas to exterminate the colonists of Haiti."³⁴

With reference to the slaves' reaction to Christianity, Michael Laguerre said that "the God of the whites" was interpreted as the one who threatened them (the slaves) with chastisement.³⁵ It is in this context that the Rastafarian Cult of Jamaica must be seen.

D. THE RASTAFARIAN CULT

This paper will show how this cult rejected Europeanized Christianity and culture and carved out for itself

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., p. 28.

a theology which upholds the dignity of the black man (within the broad confines of Judeo-Christian thought) and achieves an identity with Africa and things African unprecedented among English-speaking New World blacks.

Rastafari is a politico-religious movement. It has religious forms, but its purposes are primarily political. This movement is anti-white and anti-establishment (white-oriented). It arose mainly among people who were dissatisfied with their economic and cultural conditions. Thus it denounces the economic infrastructure of the Jamaican society and emphasizes a cultural identification with Africa. This stance obviously constitutes a reaction against Western dominance.³⁶

1. Origin

Leonard Barrett thinks that the Bedward Cult and Garveyism are the antecedents of the Rastafarians in Jamaica. In reference to Garvey's influence on the Rastafarians, Barrett says, "His ghost over-shadows the movement to this day."³⁷

Scholars of the movement concur that its beginning (1930) coincided with the coronation of H.I.M. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. As will be pointed out, much of their doctrines are based on Selassie's claim that he is a descendant of the Biblical King David.³⁸

³⁶Religion in Jamaica, pp. 11-12.

³⁷Leonard Barrett, The Rastafarians (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1959), p. 63.

³⁸Ibid., p. 130.

2. Doctrines of the Cult

The following are some of the salient doctrines of the cult.

God is black. The cultists have developed this idea of their divinity from distortion of Old Testament passages such as Jeremiah 8:21: "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment has taken hold of me." They see black Haile Selassie of Ethiopia as God or Messiah. According to the Rastafarians, Psalm 87:3-7 is unquestionable proof of this assumption:

Glorious things are spoken of thee,
O city of God. Selah
I will make mention of Rahab and
Babylon to them that know me: behold
Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this
man was born there.

According to Leonard Barrett, the Rastafarians believe that the Jesus spoken of in the Bible is Haile Selassie. The white slave masters and missionaries presented him as European for the express purpose of hiding from their black slaves their dignity. For them the "white man's God is a God of hate, blood, oppression, and war: the black man's God is a God of 'Peace and Love'." Consequently, to the Rastafarians, Christian preachers are the greatest deceivers and represent the greatest evil to the black people of Jamaica. They accuse the clergy of denying black people their true destiny by daily representing to them a God who expects them to be humble and bear suffering and shame in this life

for an imaginary heaven somewhere in the sky to be had after death.³⁹

The white man is inferior to the black man. This idea of black supremacy is an echo from the days of Marcus Garvey and remains a strong point to the Rastafarian movement. From Garvey's African Fundamentalist comes the following:

If others laugh at you, return it to them, if they mimic you return the compliment with equal force. They have no more right to dishonour, disrespect, and disregard your feeling and manhood than you have in dealing with them. Honour them when they honour you; disrespect and disregard them when they vilely treat you. Their arrogance is but skin deep and an assumption that has no foundation in morals or in law. They have sprung from the same family tree of obscurity as we have; their history is as rude in its primitiveness as ours; their ancestors ran wild and naked, lived in caves and branches of trees like monkeys, as ours; they made human sacrifices, ate the flesh of their own dead, and the raw meat of wild beasts for centuries even as they accuse us of doing; their cannibalism was more prolonged than ours; when we were embracing the arts and sciences on the banks of the Nile, their ancestors were still running naked and sleeping in holes and caves with rats, bats, and other insects and animals. After we had already unfathomed the mystery of the stars and reduced the heavenly constellations to minute and regular calculus, they were still backwoods men living in ignorance and blatant darkness.⁴⁰

The terrestriality of salvation. For the Rastafarian, the doctrine of the return to Africa counters the Christian claim that salvation is in "another world." Rastafarians assert that God gives man one life to live and one world in

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 133-134.

which to live that life.

The supremacy of life. According to the Rastafarians, traditional Christianity places too much emphasis on man's dying, rather than his living. Hence, the earthly life becomes a prelude to an "after life" and what happens in this life is considered insignificant. In the words of J. Owens, a Jesuit priest who is engaged in research among the Rastafarians, "the Rastafarians see traditional religion as the worship of death, not life, and as an emasculation of the sacredness of history, where alone the power of God for liberation is reached." Consequently, the Rastafarians emphasize life, and even deny the inevitability of death for the faithful cult members.

The corporate dimensions of evil. The Rastafarian concept of sin surpasses the traditional Christianity's narrow emphasis on individual sin and focuses on organized inequities which have been ignored by traditional Christian theology. While not neglecting to warn against individuals' disobedience in breaking the Ten Commandments, the Rastafarians reserve their sharpest denunciation for the operations of government, business, of Church and social class.

Although some of their teachings are bizarre and illogical, the Rastafarians have done much in changing the self-image of black Jamaicans. They are the only ones who make sense to the thousands of uneducated and unemployed young people who are left adrift in society. Rastafarian

influence has pervaded visual arts, popular music, and most significantly, the vocabulary of young Jamaicans.

The Brethren are severe in their critique of white Western Churches. As Owens puts it, "their hypocrisy, their classism, their easy alliance with political forces, their imported content, . . . their pecuniary mentality, all these [are] symbolized and incarnated for the Rastas, [in] Rome."⁴¹

3. Influence

The Rastafarians, with the trappings of a "religionless Christianity" are the most vital religious force in Jamaica today. They are reaching people who the Churches hardly know exist. They are radically purifying the true Christian message of liberation by speaking out loudly against injustice.

Due to the revaluation of blackness and things African in Jamaica, the Rastafarians have made a tremendous impact on many sectors of the Jamaican society. It is now a movement that must be reckoned with. The once-despised cult is given a hearing today by many well-meaning people. The movement is being examined, thanks partly to some sociological studies carried out among the Rastafarians.

The Rastafarian songs and sayings are on the lips of thousands of young Jamaicans. Their phrases attract the

⁴¹Joseph Owens, "The Rastafarians of Jamaica," in Idris Hamid (ed.) Troubling of the Waters (San Fernando: Rahaman Printery, 1973), pp. 167-168.

politicians' ears. And even the Christian Churches that had officially condemned the cult are taking a different view toward the Brethren to the extent that liberation theology in the West Indies is now eulogizing the indigenous theology of the Rastafarians. Thus a leading tutor of the United Theological College of the West Indies situated in Jamaica can say of the Rastafarians:

Here are living people who have never accepted the right of one race forcibly to transport their ancestors from Africa, and who therefore have not accepted Jamaica as anything other than the land of their captivity. Here are a group of people who, long before anyone else, and in the face of villification and abuse recognized and denounced the alliance between established religion and privilege, between theology and colonization. Here are a people who in their absolute rejection of the status quo and everything which it stands for, and the theology which it supports, have an alternative christology, an alternative soteriology, an alternative eschatology which, prima facie, and objectively are about as convincing and weak as that which has been cherished and taught by orthodox Christianity.⁴²

And Joseph Owens, the Jesuit priest, concurs with Watty in saying, "The greatest challenge of the Rastas to traditional Christianity rests in the fact that they have already decolonized much of the theology that they have received and have recast it into terms which reveal the liberating and saving message of the gospel."⁴³

E. SUMMARY

Whether in Shangoism, Voodooism, or Pocomaniaism,

⁴²Willaim Watty, "The Decolonization of Theology," in Hamid (ed.), pp. 68-69.

⁴³Owens, p. 167.

the African slaves and their descendants demonstrated their protest against the white man's religion and his cultural values. And in doing this they preserved their African culture and values.

What the Europeans saw as "barbaric erotic African superstition" was for the Africans communication with their God. Here it must be pointed out that the African's concept of the High God is not far removed from the Judeo-Christian concept of God.⁴⁴ These drumming ceremonies were to them worship, fellowship, psychiatry, and hope--in short, a way of life. And Mbiti reminds one that "African peoples do not know how to exist without religion."⁴⁵

The New World cults were also political, in that they "furthered the hope for the victory of the religion of the slaves over the religion of the colonists."⁴⁶ The slave rebellions all over the West Indies were evidently the result of this type of political thought. No one needs doubt that these political activities were planned during and inspired by the African religious ceremonies.

Many of these Africans, especially the Maroons who inspired and led many of the West Indies slave rebellions, thought it was their God-given duty to fight the oppression of Europeans and win their freedom. The Jamaican Maroon war

⁴⁴Mbiti, p. 34.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁶Laguerre, p. 23.

of 1725-1740 is evidence of this.

These Maroon wars against the British were successful not only because of the Maroons' expertise in guerrilla warfare, but because of their religion. Europeans and their "Christianity" attributed their success to African sorcery. But this was the assessment of the enemy. The Maroons believed that they communicated with God and He defeated their enemies. This writer is a descendant of the Jamaican Maroons. In some of the Maroon villages there are landmarks commemorating the defeat of the English soldiers through African spirituality. It is of interest to the writer to note that European "Christianity," in recalling the event, taught that the Maroons' success over the English was due to Maroon black magic and "devil work." However, the relevant question is, "Who were workers of the 'devil'?"--a people fighting for their freedom, or a people who were maiming, dehumanizing, oppressing, and literally killing an innocent group of people?

In a sense these Afro-West Indian religions were not only pockets of resistance to European culture, but they were enclaves of African culture. Censored by governments, condemned by planters and missionaries alike, one wonders how these African religions survived. But they survived because the slaves could neither live nor die without them.

After Emancipation and during the colonial period, European Christianity in the Caribbean frowned on them and drove them into the backyards to work out their own salvation. There they worked it out. Though their salvation was

influenced by Christianity, yet their ethos of salvation was different from the European's, for these Afro-West Indian Cultists were listening, not to London and Amsterdam, but to Ghana and Nigeria.

Today the voices of the cults are heard on the hills and in the valleys of the Caribbean territories. And conscious West Indians are grateful for their historial protest against European culture and Europeanized Christianity, and for the preservation of African culture in the West Indies.

Today when West Indians reflect on their past, they cannot identify with a European culture that crusaded against the African and the things he represented; neither can they identify with a Christianity which sanctioned their enslavement. But they identify with these Afro-Creole movements which in substance were protest movements against the tyranny of Europe and her Christianity.

Therefore, today, whenever a Pocomania, Voodoo, Shango, or Rastafarian drum is struck, the true-blooded Afro-West Indian remembers that to his ancestors the drum meant a call to protest--a call to freedom. Today, if the sound of the drum is not a call to political freedom (political freedom has already been achieved), it should be a call to cultural freedom in the Caribbean.

CHAPTER V

TOWARD THE WEST INDIANIZATION OF THE CHURCH FOR THE WHOLENESS OF CARIBBEAN MAN

A. THE RELEVANCE OF AN INDIGENOUS CHURCH

As the West Indians' ancestors, amidst an alien culture and religion and drawing from their African experience and Christianity, structured a belief system that made sense to them, so the modern West Indians must carve out a theological path that is comensurate with their experience. In doing this they will be on the road toward the West Indianization of the Church, for the West Indianization of the Church presupposes the West Indianization of the Church's theology.

1. Why a West Indian Theology?

It may be asked, "Why a West Indian theology?" when there already exists the oft-tried theology of the Christian tradition. In attempting to answer this question, some relevant points need to be made. First, theology is not structured in a vacuum. The framers of theologies are influenced by their cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. Similarly, the reader of theology understands the message from his own cultural viewpoint. As William Watty rightly observes, "He who reads or hears theology is not a tabula rasa, but on the contrary, receives the communication with

certain predispositions, a life situation and expectation, thought-forms and premonitions, a life situation and a world-view, which largely determined the character of what is . . . [read]."¹ There is no pure theology as such.

The theology, then, that was taught in the colonial epoch must have reflected the colonial experience. It is not likely that what Christians thought about God could have been separated from what they thought about colonies. There is much truth to Watty's observation that "theology in the colonial era could be regarded as mytholization of colonialism, and colonialism the historical outworking of a theology. . . . It [theology] was so modified and redirected as to promote what was considered legitimate aims of the founding colonists."²

Second, colonial theology served to dehumanize West Indians of color. Colonial theology cared for souls while brutalizing bodies.³ Third, it called for a conversion that produced "not liberated people but domesticated beings": a Christian theology that taught that it was Christian for slaves to be submissive under all conditions, a theology which legitimized the exploitation of the down-trodden was contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence it was not

¹William Watty, "The Decolonization of Theology," in Idris Hamid (ed.) Troubling of the Waters (San Fernando: Rahaman Printery, 1973), p. 154.

²Ibid., p. 155.

³Idris Hamid, In Search of New Perspectives (San Fernando: Catholic News Printery, 1971), p. 12.

Christian theology.⁴ This type of theology is what Dibinga Wa Said aptly calls "Bourgeois Theology." He assesses this theology as "the embodiment of all forces of evil which contributed . . . to the eternal pains of sufferings of the people of African blood."⁵

In lucid words, Idris Hamid points to the reason colonial theology is unacceptable to the new West Indian people: "A religious and ethical system which in a large measure undergirded slavery, colonialism, indentured labour, and poverty, which was feeble in its protest when it was not silent in the face of grave inhumanities, cannot provide the impulses for a new human oriented society."⁶

Fourth, theology is partly shaped by the experiences of the people to whom it is directed. Appropriate illustrations of this principle are North American frontier evangelism in early American history and European existentialist theologies which sprang up after World War I.⁷

A Caribbean theology then must reflect the history, the geography, and the culture of the West Indian man. It must speak to the peculiar needs of the West Indian man.

⁴Idris Hamid, "Theology and Caribbean Development," in David Mitchell (ed.) With Eyes Wide Open (Bridgetown, Barbados: CADC, 1973), p. 124.

⁵Dibinga Wa Said, "An African Theology of Decolonization," Harvard Theological Review, LXIV (October 1971), 504.

⁶Hamid, In Search of New Perspectives, p. 12.

⁷Hamid, "Theology and Caribbean Development," p. 120.

Consequently, a Euro-American-centric theology can no longer serve the new West Indian people. The people of the region need a theology that is born out of West Indian cultural milieu.

2. God in West Indian History

As colonialism served the interests of West Indian colonists, so did the history that was taught in the West Indies. West Indians were never taught to be proud of their history as Europeans and Americans were trained to be proud of their historical heritage. They were taught to see great significance in European history. Their teachers pointed to the guiding hand of providence in the Battle of Tours when the Frenchman Charles Martel cut short the conquest of the Moors. But the hand of God was never seen in the Maroon Wars of Jamaica, nor in the Haitian Independence Revolution of the 1890s. Not only was God taken out of secular training, but as Hamid points out, "in our religious training, one is hard put to find any attempt to see God operating in our former cultures and Caribbean history."⁸ Surely, a people without a significant past is a people without a significant future. Therefore, what colonial theology did not do, West Indian theology must do: point a people to the operation of God in their history. Thus arises the question of salvation history.

⁸Hamid, New Perspectives, p. 7.

3. Salvation History

During the colonial era, salvation-history was presented "as one line stretching from Abraham through Moses, David, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, Constantine, the Popes, the Reformers, to Queen Victoria." This was a plan to present Europe to other nations of the world as the heir of Christianity. What the Jewish nation should have been to the ancient world, Europeans must now be to the modern world. In other words, Christianity must be funneled through Europeans to the other nations of the world. Watty's incisive analysis of this situation is relevant here:

In order to establish Europe within the divine economy there was necessarily a theological depreciation of other histories. There was only one salvation-history which excluded the history of all other peoples, or which recognized their authenticity only as they were brought within the range of Western Christendom. Much of the ideology of colonialism and the theology of missionary activity can be explained by the notion of salvation history: Jesus, the Saviour of men, was the denial of all other histories save the history of the Jews which He fulfilled and the history of the Europeans which He created.⁹

This whole view of salvation-history was just what Europeans wanted non-white people in the colonies to believe. But the Bible does not support this "parochialization of salvation." Admittedly, the Bible focuses on the history of one people, the Jews. But as Watty has rightly shown: "Nowhere in the Old Testament is the special relationship of God to Israel intended to imply an exclusive relationship in

⁹Watty, p. 73.

the sense that God does not act in the history of other peoples as well."¹⁰ It is only in the context of Yahweh's purpose as sole Creator and God that Israel is called into being (Gen. 12:1-3, Isaiah 49:6).

It is also worthy of note that prophets like Amos and Isaiah recognized the special relationship between God and Israel but they also saw God's leadership in other nations (Syria and Philistia) and His purpose in history carried out by non-Jewish people (Amos 3:7; 9:7; Isa. 10:5-19; 36:10). The Deutoronomist writers, the Psalmists, and Isaiah pictured Yahweh as lord of all the nations of earth and history.

According to Watty, the implication of this Biblical picture is that "salvation-history is a special interpretation of history for purposes of ideology, identification, and propaganda. Consequently, there is theological validity and authenticity inherent in the histories of each people." To Watty, all histories are potentially salvation-history. It is all dependent on the question of how a people interpret their history in relation to the rest of the world. In support of this thesis, Paul's communication with the Galatians and Athenians is cited (Gal. 3:5; Acts 17:22-31). Here Paul is authenticating and not negating the history of the Gentiles. Watty then concludes, "Salvation-history in the colonial era, even as it was preached by missionaries, was a denial of salvation-history as it is to be found in

¹⁰Ibid.

the Bible, that it disparaged the authentic history of other peoples in the interest of Europeans."¹¹

The God who made all things (and "without Him was nothing made that was made") created the West Indian nations. West Indians then are not affirming too much when they affirm with William Watty: "The vicissitudes which have brought peoples from three continents to settle and amalgamate between the other two could not have been outside the scope of divine Providence and His lordship of history."¹²

Therefore, the Caribbean territories being the hinge on which the two American continents swing and a gateway between East and West (because of the Panama Canal) have a significant role to play with respect to their relations with the other nations of the world. Like the Israelites of the Bible, their vocation may be that of witnessing.

4. Theology of Land Possession and Witness

Hence Caribbean people should see their history as Vocation-history. In this connection, two relevant theological viewpoints are suggested by William Watty: (1) West Indian multi-racial harmony can serve as a witness to a world smoldering with racial tension, and (2) there is a correlation between West Indians' calling and the possession of land in the Caribbean.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 73-74.

¹²Ibid., p. 75.

Caribbean people are racially mixed. By and large, the many races there have learned to live peacefully. Should not their history then be seen in this light? In a world torn with racial strife, they can serve as an example of racial harmony to other nations, as well as a corrective to many a nation's racial intolerance.

Amidst the landlessness and poverty of the West Indian people, Watty sees a theology of land possession as very relevant. He suggests that Vocation-history is meaningless to West Indians apart from the possession of land and sea. In this connection Watty avers:

Abraham's people had to do with their possession of land (Deut. 26:5-9). . . . It was after Abraham had purchased property in Canaan that he looked for a "better country" (Heb. 11:13-16) but only after. Jesus calls men away from houses, lands, etc. but He assumes that they have houses, land, etc. in this present life (Mark 10:29-31). Land distribution and land use are crucial for the Caribbean people's understanding of their history as Salvation-History and their future as a Divine calling into a covenant.¹³

These two theological points are debatable, but they are relevant to the Caribbean peoples.

In a world torn by racial tensions and the problems of land ownership, it may be that the Caribbean peoples, by virtue of their own history, are being called to be "a light to the nations that . . . salvation might reach the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).¹⁴

Idris Hamid's concept of Caribbean theology concurs

¹³Ibid., pp. 75, 76.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 76.

with the above assessment when he suggests that theology must seriously take into account the condition of man "in whose midst theology is arising." According to him, "man must be the focus of theology for man is the focus of God." This was evident in the incarnation. Hamid observes that "when God became man in Jesus Christ he entered our humanity with a finality, that is eternal. God does not treat man in any sort of general way. He relates to people in their particularity. . . . God doesn't 'dish' out the same breakfast to everybody. He knows that some have different tastes and needs and serves accordingly."¹⁵ Therefore a theology of land-possession and witness is man-centered; hence, it is meaningful and relevant in the West Indies.

One would hope that when Watty and Hamid speak so eloquently of the Caribbean man they are not only referring to the middle-class Caribbean man, but all Caribbean people, including the poor people. There is a tendency for middle class leaders to speak about the poor, and for the poor, but muzzle the "voice" of the poor. Any theology from the West Indies that does not include the "voice" of the poor will not be truly liberating, but will be a Neo-Bourgeois theology. For it must be remembered that it was the poor, lower class Afro-West Indian slaves and their descendants who carved out an alternative theological system and sustained their existence vis-a-vis an upper and middle class, unfeeling, European

¹⁵Hamid, "Theology and Caribbean Development," pp. 126-127.

"Christianity." Consequently, an emerging West Indian theology must consult and reflect the belief and practice of the lower class people of the West Indies. Thus Hamid points in the right direction when he says, "Theology must search out the varied ways in which he [God] has made himself known to our people, and the understanding our people have of Him, as these were experienced in our cultural milieu. These may be found in our wisdom sayings, our songs and literature, and the oral tradition."¹⁶

5. Identity via Destruction of Stereotypes

One of the ways in which God made himself known to West Indian slaves was by providing them with the ingenuity to undermine the evil system of slavery. But Europeans saw this as a character trait of Negroes. Caribbean theology, in seeking to ensure and promote the identity and dignity of West Indian people, must also seek to destroy European stereotypes about black people. It is significant that these stereotypes were developed in the Caribbean with the blessing of the Churches. They must therefore be destroyed by the people who have suffered as a result of them.

In an article, James Springer asserts that stereotyping has done more harm among West Indian and other non-white peoples of the world than any other single thing. For instance, the argument runs, "The Amerindian [sic] cannot

¹⁶Ibid., p. 126.

hold his liquor, the Black man is lazy, and the East Indian is dirty." Springer then points out that these are not values, but rather stereotypes originating first from the practice of the European of pre-judging everyone else without taking the trouble to get to know him. Stereotyping is a cultural tool that posits that the other person is different and therefore inferior.¹⁷

The effects of stereotyping have affected the psyche of West Indian people. This is a problem that West Indians will have to find solutions for. Leaders of the Church need to listen to non-clerical West Indian men also, as they grapple with this problem. Thus Walter Rodney states that West Indians have digested the stereotypes that Europeans have hurled at them. As a result West Indians see themselves through the eyes of Europeans. Rodney calls upon West Indians to change this situation when he says, "It is time we started seeing through our own eyes." He continues, "[We] must begin with a revaluation of ourselves as blacks and with a redefinition of the world from our own standpoint."¹⁸

Also Orlando Patterson's assessment of the stereotyped conception held by whites of their West Indian slaves is most relevant and enlightening. He points out that what

¹⁷James Springer, "West Indian Value System and the Churches' Validating Role," in Hamid (ed.) Troubling of the Waters, p. 136.

¹⁸Walter Rodney, The Grounding with My Brothers (London: Villiers, 1969), p. 34.

the whites see as character traits of Negroes was simply a reaction to a real life situation. Patterson states:

The real life situation of the slave . . . was one in which there was a complete breakdown of all major institutions--the family, marriage, religion, organized morality. This situation was made worse by the fact that the white group offered no alternative mores and institutions, but was just as disorganized socially as they were. There could be no kind of guiding principle then, in the socialization of the slave, except that of evasion, which he learned from hard experience. The habitual laziness of the slave was also largely the function of his work situation. From early childhood he was stimulated to work, not by the expectation of reward, but entirely by the threat of punishment. Naturally, he grew to hate work and could only be industrious if forced to. The happy-go-lucky irresponsibility of the slave could also be explained in terms of his upbringing, especially with regard to males when we recall the demoralizing of slavery on them.¹⁹

According to Patterson these stereotypes undoubtedly contained a "kernel of truth." But he cites the research of Prothro and Milikian on stereotypes which informs that stereotypes reflect the "characteristics of the individuals holding the stereotypes or the state of politico-economic relations between groups." This principle holds true for the plantation overlords in the West Indies. Thus the outright "brutality and unrestrained exploitation of the system" caused even the unfeeling plantocrats to employ a system of rationalization to justify slavery. Therefore certain aspects of the slave's personality traits were taken and elaborated into a generalized "body of truths" about the Negro. Accordingly,

¹⁹ Orlando Patterson, "The Socialization and Personality Structure of the Slave," in Lambros Comitas and David Lowenthal (eds.) Slaves, Free Men, Citizens (New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 41, 42.

there is the relevant observation of R. K. Morton as cited by Patterson: "The systematic condemnation of the outgroup continues largely irrespective of what he does; more, through a freakish exercise of judicial logic, the victim is punished for the crime."²⁰ From the fact that the white masters had complete control over the slaves, one can easily see how they created the conditions that would materialize and actualize the stereotypes they had of these slaves.

A further dimension of the use of stereotypes in the slave-master relations in the West Indies is the subordinate group playing the stereotype of the superordinate group for its own ends. It is a fact, although little is heard of it, that the slaves in the West Indian plantations (and elsewhere) played upon the master's stereotype for their own ends. Patterson suggests that playing the stereotype had three functions.

First, the slave's acting foolishly pleased the master inwardly for it served as a further proof of the master's rationalizations. Therefore, from the slave's point of view, this act was a "direct appeal to, and exploitation of the inevitable see-what-I-mean mentality of their masters."

Second, by acting out the role of the stereotype, the slave both disguised his true feelings and had the psychological satisfaction of deceiving the master. Truly the

²⁰Ibid., p. 43.

Jamaican Negro proverb, "Play fool to catch wise," sums up this form of stereotype playing.

Third, if the slaves resented a superior such as an overseer and wanted to get rid of him, they acted out the perfect Quashee (down-right stupid person) by being stupid and completely inefficient. Thus by this pretended stupidity they rendered the overseer's work unproductive and made him a candidate for certain and quick dismissal.²¹

Approaching this problem from a different angle, Idris Hamid points out that colonial theology and the practices of the West Indian Church forced the slaves into making certain responses which were considered devilish. However, these slave responses were more consistent with Bible-oriented Christianity than the Faith that existed in the West Indian plantation system. For Hamid, God was among the suffering slaves, rather than among the "civilized" barbarous plantocrats and their supporters. As Hamid rightly asserts, "He [God] was present more in the canefields than in the cathedrals, more in the baracoons than in the basilicas, more in the 'protests' than in the 'obedience', more in their sorrows than in the sacraments of the Church."

Christ had to work underground with the slaves because the Church had abandoned its sense of justice. Hence Christ was with the slaves fighting to overthrow the corrupt establishment, not to stabilize it. Consequently, Caribbean

²¹Ibid., pp. 43-44.

theology must affirm the faithful responses of the slaves to the corrupt system, especially those that were considered unfaithful--those which created the stereotypes. In this connection Hamid observes that "the central issue in the Caribbean history is not common law marriages or some such issue as we have been made to believe. It is the abuse of man."²²

In the light of what has been said regarding stereotypes, when Caribbean peoples think about identity, they must not just search for new forms--West Indian thought or worship forms--to replace the old. They must first grapple theologically with these stereotypes that have made deep incisions in the psyche of the West Indian people. It is only on these lines that a true West Indian identity can be realized. And James Springer's advice to the church is worthy of attention: "The Church needs to play a leading role in giving man in the Caribbean for the first time a high evaluation of himself." Then comes the caution, "It will not be enough to invalidate the stereotype in some negative way."²³ Church leaders then must find something positive to replace the stereotype. It may be that where they preached of "wicked sinners," they should now preach of "fallen sons." The question is open. West Indians must search for solutions to this vexing problem. From the above observations and

²²Hamid, "Theology and Caribbean Development," pp. 125-127.

²³Springer, p. 137.

theological insights, it is clear that within the West Indian Church are the possibilities for the reflection of Caribbean culture and theological perspectives.

6. Worship and Community

As this study has already pointed out, the European missionaries never considered the indigenization of the Church's theology, to say nothing of its liturgy. Consequently, Christianity has remained, in the eyes of many, what Knolly Clarke calls the "natural religion of the conqueror." Clarke complains that as a result of this situation, the Anglican churches in the Caribbean worship just as their English counterparts. The Eucharist is celebrated according to the pattern set in a prayer book of 1549 or another of 1662. Not only Clarke, but other Church leaders in the Caribbean are unhappy with the West Indian Church's foreign form of worship.²⁴

Hamid must have been thinking about the foreign import of West Indian worship when he says, "God is really foreign to us. In the religious imagination of our people He is a benign, white foreigner--'an expatriate'. Even the categories of our religious experiences are imports which do not reflect our culture and native experiences. We experience God as an outsider in the bad sense of that encounter."²⁵

²⁴Knolly Clarke, "Liturgy and Culture in the Caribbean," in Hamid (ed.), Troubling of the Waters, p. 142.

²⁵Hamid, In Search of New Perspectives, p. 8.

a. Negritude. However, with the coming of independence and self-government, West Indians are very appreciative of their cultural heritage. Caribbean peoples are moving away from the aping of Europe to being proud of their African descent. The Haitian poet, Leon Laleau, aptly expresses this new feeling of negritude:

This obsessed Heart, which does not correspond
To my language and my clothing
And upon which bite like a clamp
Borrowed emotions and customs
From Europe--do you feel the suffering
And the despair, equal to none other
Of taming with words from France
This heart which came from Senegal?²⁶

As many Caribbean writers have been pointing out, life in the Caribbean is characterized by singing and dancing. This form of expression does not refer to the stereotype Calypso-singing island boy of the tourist mentality. Amidst the vicissitudes of life, Caribbean people have the disposition to sing, dance and celebrate. Undoubtedly, race and geography form part of the reason for this disposition. Clarke cites the Caribbean poet Basil Smith to reinforce the above-mentioned observation:

Give me Tom--Tom abeng, abeng, abeng!
Carve my features in the likeness of a bronze
Yoruba mask!
Give me personality the rhythm of the drum and make
my blood boil to the temperature of the Sahara!
Teach me to dance
The way my grandmother has forgotten
and don't hide the face of Shango from me
Then and only then shall I be a man.²⁷

²⁶Clarke, pp. 146-147.

²⁷Ibid., p. 147.

As has already been pointed out, Shango is a Yoruba divinity which originally hailed from Southern Nigeria. Devotees of this cult are found among the black masses in Trinidad and Brazil. This poem expresses West Indian religious sentiments and somewhat parallels J. C. McLelland's thoughts. According to Clarke, McLelland, in Crown and Crocodile, asserts that "man's song and dance are self-expression, but they are also done for others, for the [Other]. It is before God that dance comes into its own. . . ."28

b. Chafing foreign worship forms. Because of his love for dance and rhythm, the West Indian man feels caged when he is asked to worship like Anglo-Saxons in a formal and stiff manner. This type of worship is most offensive and intolerable to the uneducated and the poor. The following passage, quoted by Knolly Clarke from Austin Clarke's Easter Carol, points to the problem of an imposed foreign liturgy on the West Indian churches:

I was the only one in my village who belonged to the Church of England. My mother, who was brought up in this Church, had recently started to attend the Church of the Nazarene because she felt its services were more like a part of her life, more emotional, more exciting, more tragic and more happy: something like the holy day when "them twelve men gathered up in that room upstairs, and talked in twelve different complete languages and dialect, Christ, like nobodys business!" There she could stand up in her large congregation, and open her heart to God, and to them, and tell the whole world that yesterday, God stepped in and Satan stepped out, Amen! and she was brought through, pretty and clean. There she could testify how God helped her when she didn't know where the hell she could get six cents from to buy

²⁸Ibid., pp. 146-147.

flour and lard and oil to make bakes for her children. There she could clap her hands and stamp her feet till the floor boards creaked with emotion, and jump in the air and praise God and for all that feel God was listening. But in the Church of England she was regimented to sit-and-stand exercise of dull, religious drilling. And she did not understand one word of what the parson was talking about. He used words that simple, common people could not understand. And never, never "have I seen anybody stand up in the Church of England, and say, Amen, Hallelulia to God." It was such a strange Church to her.²⁹

In the West Indies, it is necessary that all churches--Church of England or Church of Rome--should be the Church of the West Indies in their theology and liturgy so that they may not be strange churches to West Indians.

The criticism concerning the unsuitability of foreign liturgy is not confined to the uneducated but is being echoed by some university-trained leaders of the West Indian Church. Thus, Idris Hamid, a West Indian theologian of stature, speaks of a foreign liturgy in which his people were trapped. He points out that the entrenched style and content of these foreign elements in liturgy made for a loss of faith in native elements. In reference to the far-reaching consequences of imported liturgy, Hamid observes:

It led . . . to denigration of our culture, our folk-ways and our histories. If God could not be seen as operating through these and as a being, communicated through these, then these elements are in a real sense rejects of God. Furthermore, it gave the denigration a "divine" stamp upon it, thereby conferring an authority and finality.

Hamid then makes the insightful statement, "Man and his cultural historical milieu are not two separate realities.

²⁹Ibid., p. 141.

Rather man is part and parcel of the cultural historical milieu, so the rejection of the latter inescapably involves rejection of man himself."³⁰

c. Utilization of Caribbean music in worship. On the question of Church music, James Springer, of the University of the West Indies, thinks the Church ought to observe that the West Indians by nature prefer the calypso and other West Indian songs to the classics. "The great depth of the Calypso, the swaying rhythm of the Raggae have all been born of West Indian Folk Culture, and are to be preferred to Mozart, Bach, and Chopin by all full-blooded West Indians." Therefore, to invalidate the notion that everything foreign is good, the Church must learn to channel the rhythm of the Calypsonians and the prowess of native poets. Springer then points out that "the West Indian cultural talent will not have achieved fulfillment until the Church has taken it and sanctified it through usage, and offered it as the creation on the altar of the Caribbean to the God of the people of the Caribbean."³¹ This author agrees.

Not only should the talents of West Indian people be utilized in the services of the Church but also their local instruments. There is no tangible reason for the use of the organ or piano over the drum in Church services. For the first twelve hundred years of the Christian era, the

³⁰Hamid, "Theology and Caribbean Development," p. 128.

³¹Springer, p. 135.

organ was not used by the Christian Church. It was not until the twelfth century that the organ was used in the Latin Church services.³² What, then, makes the use of the organ more sacred than the drum? It is only fitting that the drum, whose sounds are musical to the ears of Afro-Asian peoples, be utilized in Caribbean worship services.

Is it not tragic that due to the narrow-mindedness of Europeans, the elements of rhythm in music (from the drum, etc.) and song were omitted from the worship of people who are descendants of Africans and Asians? If the Church is to be relevant in the West Indies, it must recognize and validate the cultural and emotive patterns of the Caribbean people. Brian Wicker's observation, as cited by Knolly Clarke, becomes relevant here: "To disassociate a person from the pattern provided for him by his own culture is not only unnecessary but is liable to destroy his personal integrity, the moral centre which is the foundation of his capacity . . . [to think]."³³

B. THE GOSPEL FOCUSED ON CARIBBEAN MAN'S NEEDS

1. Twisted Teachings of Colonial Theology

It was not only the liturgy that was foreign-oriented,

³²Albert Hauck, "Organ," in Phillip Schaff (ed.) Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. III (New York: Funk and Wagnalls. 1891), p. 1702.

³³Clarke, p. 146.

but the actual teachings of the Gospel were twisted to benefit Colonial interests so that in the West Indies the Gospel was presented in a manner that made for a colonial-type pietistic Christianity. There, the spiritual significance of the physical in man was played down. West Indian Christian teaching accentuated spirit, morality (the question of morality was always ambiguous), and individual salvation. As a result of this one-sided interpretation of Scripture, the following have become an integral part of Christian teaching in the whole Caribbean:

1. The body is of little importance, the important aspect of man is the spirit or his soul.
2. Therefore man's physical and external needs are not important; it is his inner spiritual needs that count.
3. The Christian should not be concerned about community--his neighbors and others--but should concentrate on having his soul saved. The Christian's only interest in his neighbor is the saving of the neighbor's soul.
4. Christians should not expect better on this earth; therefore they should look to the after-life for the correction of injustices meted out to them here. There, the poor will get rich and the rich will never enter.

It is significant that these heretical teachings were handy tools in the hands of the colonial masters. These false emphases served to divert the West Indian's attention from his present suffering to a future goal in the next world. For when people are concentrating on the hereafter, their

attention is taken away from the "now"--the harsh problems of injustice and human sufferings inflicted by the holders of wealth and power in colonial-type societies. But these teachings, at their best, are mere caricatures of Christian themes.³⁴ Thus it is necessary to reinterpret the Gospel so that its dynamics can focus on the Caribbean man's needs.

2. Fresh Understanding of Creation and Incarnation

The Christian doctrines of creation and Incarnation belie these above-mentioned interpretations of Christianity. First, the doctrine of creation posits that God created the physical world and man in society. Contrary to gnostic dualism, the doctrine of creation asserts that every part of man is good; not only his spirit, but his body, all of him is good. Therefore, the conditions under which he works are as important as the conditions under which he prays.³⁵

The doctrine of creation does not make room for a tragic sense of life and asceticism which colonial theology posited; but on the contrary, the Old Testament, especially, is replete with tremendous taste for physical life. Thus Ruben Alves's observation is relevant here:

It [the Old Testament's faith] speaks about love for life, for this world, not a joy beyond life and the world. Its objects and occasions are very worldly: the bread that strengthens men's heart, the oil that makes his face to

³⁴Hamid, In Search of New Perspectives, p. 6.

³⁵Roy Branson in a lecture given at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, January 31, 1972.

shine, the good wine that makes him glad (Psalm 104:15), the bodily presence of a friend, the pleasure of sex, the relaxation of rest. This is joy in the world and in the present, because of the world and the present. It is language that overflows with Dionysian erotic sense of life and never apologises for life.³⁶

Therefore, these heretical emphases of Colonial-type piestic theology vis-a-vis the doctrine of creation and Old Testament faith are found wanting.

In addition to what has been said, a new understanding of the incarnation would further "break down the wall between material and spiritual, the profane and the sacred; the body and the spirit." With proper understanding of the incarnation, one cannot save the soul and leave the ravaged body untended. Jesus Christ in his incarnation breaks down these man-made divisions. In this connection Hamid points out that "when God became fully man in Jesus, He made sacred every area of existence. His redemptive activity encompassed all of life; spirit and body, prayer and work, altar and play-field."³⁷

Certainly all material questions have spiritual implications; hence one should not compartmentalize God's concern and the Church's mission. And as Hamid reminds West Indians: "We who have our souls cared for and our bodies brutalized" should insist on the holding together of man's body and spirit as of equal importance to God and consequently

³⁶Ruben Alves, A Theology of Human Hope (Washington: Corpus Books, 1969), p. 146.

³⁷Hamid, In Search of New Perspectives, p. 10.

to His Church. Teilhard de Chardin adequately speaks to the question of the unity of the body and the spirit in saying:

To think we must eat. . . . That blunt statement expresses a whole economy and reveals according to the way we look at it, either the tyranny of matter or its spiritual power. The loftiest speculation, the most burning love are, as we know only too well, accompanied and paid for by an expenditure of physical energy. Sometimes we need bread . . . sometimes the magic sound which goes to our ears as a vibration and reaches our brains in the form of inspiration.³⁸

That God took on flesh in Jesus Christ is the scandal of the Gospel. And if the Church in the West Indies is representing her master, she must reflect this exaltation of flesh in dealing with suffering West Indian peoples. This will put an end to the dichotomy between body and spirit, sacred and profane, and material and spiritual which were the hallmarks of Colonial theology.

3. Liberation from Socio-Economic Oppression

Judeo-Christian teachings rooted in the concrete must deal with man's economic concerns. Hence, although the main interest of this research is cultural and theological, and not economic, yet it shall discuss briefly economic matters with which the Christian Church ought to grapple.

As has been pointed out, Jesus' incarnation identifies Him with suffering man. He identifies with man in all his conditions. Not only in His incarnation is He related to poor, suffering man, but Jesus also interprets His mission in terms

³⁸ Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 63.

of liberation for the poor and the oppressed:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

This statement indicates that Jesus is interested in releasing the poor from the spiritual and economic oppression in which they are trapped. And more significant, this liberation suggests a "nowness"--not a future liberation, but a liberation now in this present world.

Jesus attacked the socio-economic system which was oppressing the poor. It must be noted that when Jesus drove out the peddlers from the Temple, He was upsetting the center of the Jewish economy. In Luke 6:11-17, it is suggested that Zealots were among His converts. It is believed they saw in Jesus the leader who had the right method to carry out reforms in that unjust society.³⁹ Thus Jesus, in His incarnation and teaching, sought for the liberation of the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed. Therefore, Christians and the Church must not only support, but must initiate, forces for the liberation of suffering and oppressed man.

4. The Church's Unique Role

Before one can deal with a unique role of the churches in the Caribbean, one must understand liberation in Caribbean terms. The basic situation in the Caribbean is one of

³⁹Branson.

dependency, hence the goal and focus of change must be a "liberated" rather than a "developed" society. As McCormack rightly asserts, "Development under conditions of dependency develops the contradictions within society without moving the society to a position of independence and self-direction."⁴⁰

There is a surge of a new humanism in the West Indies. This humanism rejects the traditional view of man as a person "conditioned by market forces, acritical and submissive." It sees a person as one capable of meeting other persons on a truly human level and in conditions which are created by persons and not impersonal forces. Among the advocates of this new humanism there is the feeling that the time has come to affirm, with all the firmness of their being, that the traditional system cannot provide the atmosphere for dignity and freedom and selfhood.⁴¹

How must the churches relate themselves to the above-mentioned situation? The point of departure of this paper is a dominated Caribbean with a silent Church. Hence this must be the point of departure of the Church in its action to solve the problems of West Indian people. If Christianity can have any relevance to the life "here and now," it must mean for West Indians that Christianity furnishes an understanding of their conditions and ways to overcome them. McCormack evidences a keen understanding of the West Indian

⁴⁰Michael McCormack, "Liberation or Development," GISRA, II (1971), 17.

⁴¹Ibid.

situation in saying, "The teaching and practice of the Churches in the West Indies must be such as to interpret the message of Christ to West Indian man in ways which allow him to be both fully West Indian and fully Christian."⁴²

5. Charity or Justice

Undoubtedly another role of the churches in the West Indies is to initiate justice within the West Indian society. But, historically, the churches were closely identified with the oppressors of the poor--with the upper and middle class elites--rather than fulfilling their mission of liberation of the poor and the oppressed.

Unfortunately, in most cases the only response the churches make to economic oppression of the poor is that of charity. There is justification for the assertion that much of the charity work of the churches entrenches the status quo by deflating natural pressures for social change. Some see this type of charity as postponing the inevitable struggle for social reform in society.⁴³ "Charity," says Hamid, "can be the most uncharitable thing."⁴⁴ The churches then should no longer make charity their major Christian response to man's oppression.

It is not charity that the poor of the Caribbean need;

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Richard Dickenson, Line and Plummet (Lausanne: Imprimerie La Concorde, 1968), p. 78.

⁴⁴Hamid, "Theology and Caribbean Development," p. 130.

they need justice. Justice is the active part of love. Consequently, God demands from man love; loving one's neighbor means, among other things, the removal of those things that oppress and dehumanize him.⁴⁵

It is not enough for the Church to preach order and humility in the face of the oppression of the poor. Dr. Roy Marshall suggests that "harmony of unequal partners, unity forced by domination and order based on unjust laws are structures ripe for destruction."⁴⁶ In this connection, Sam Palmer, cited by Neehall, makes an apt observation: "So often order provides a camouflage for injustice that the very quest for justice generates disorder. . . ."⁴⁷ Allan Patton's observation, quoted by Wa Said, is relevant here: "The greatest challenge to Christianity . . . is pseudo-Christianity. And the marks of pseudo-Christianity are always easy to recognise: it always prefers stability to change; it always prefers order to freedom; it always prefers what it considers realism to love."⁴⁸ It is this role that the traditional West Indian Church has been playing.

The churches in the West Indies are too much at ease with the capitalistic system and the politics that underpin

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 131.

⁴⁶Roy Neehall, "Justice Liberation and the Christian Gospel," Caribbean Contact, II (1973), 63.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Wa Said, "An African Theology of Decolonization," p. 514.

it. The whole ethics of the churches have been greatly influenced by the unjust values of that system. Caribbean society sanctioned the practice in which a few live in luxury at the labor of others who are eking out an existence. Thus the churches in the Caribbean must not "be silent in the face of class distinction, lopsided distribution of wealth and opportunities, of human and material resources, and the predatory individualism which that system nurtures."⁴⁹

In speaking on the side of justice for the suffering West Indians, the churches will be accused of playing politics. But as Hamid said, the question is not one of labels, but of humanity. Thus it will be better for this accusation to be hurled at the churches by the traditional holders of power in the society than for the churches to continue to support the unjust system that oppresses the poor. Julius Nyerere's observation on this question clarifies these issues. In a speech to a New York church group, Nyerere (cited in McCormack) said:

I am not asking that the Church should surrender or allow itself to be identified with particular political doctrines. On the contrary, what I am saying amounts to a demand that it should stop allowing itself to be identified with unjust political and economic power groups. For the Church should want to be identified with the pursuit for social justice. This is what I am asking you to promote. The poor and the oppressed should come to you, not for alms, but for support against injustice.⁵⁰

A response to Nyerere's plea is reflected in the

⁴⁹Hamid, In Search of New Perspectives, p. 132.

⁵⁰McCormack, "Liberation or Development," p. 18.

present aims and activities of some West Indian churches. They are now acknowledging that the Church's responsibility is to help in creating a just society. And this vision of the Church is brought into sharp focus in the move to Westindianize the Caribbean Church. This purpose will entail, among other things, the structuring of a new theology, the assuming of cultural and racial identity, the reflecting of Afro-Asian elements in liturgy, and the securing of justice and economic liberation for the poor West Indians.

Since the West Indian people have experiences peculiar to the region, the West Indian Church can only be meaningful and relevant when it is reflecting West Indian culture and theological perspectives.

6. Summary

Colonialism and colonial theology have made no room for the wholeness of the West Indian man. Colonial theology provided him with no significant history of his past. Hence he cannot see God operating in his past. It sanctioned his being torn from his roots (his family) to work in distant canefields under inhuman conditions. It emphasized God's interest in his soul while it approved the brutalizing of his body. Later, by its accent on foreign elements in worship, native West Indian elements were seen as rejects by God's Church. The result: West Indians with divided personalities, questioning who they are and to whom or what should they give their loyalty.

Only a West Indianized Church can deal adequately with the problems facing the West Indian man. This chapter has dealt with an indigenous theology that speaks to West Indians in their own cultural milieu. Also the note of God in West Indian history is struck so that West Indians can see spiritual significance in their ancestors (three different races) coming from three continents to work and mingle with a fourth race.

Second, here the redirection of the Gospel is advocated. The Gospel was distorted in the fostering of colonial interests rather than the good of man. With this new perspective, the West Indians are now seeing that the doctrine of Creation reveals the goodness of the land created for the good of man here and now. Likewise, a fresh look at the incarnation reveals that God places great importance on the body. Our Lord exalted flesh. The incarnation makes all areas of man's life sacred--his work as well as his worship.

Third, the West Indianization of the Christian Church in the Caribbean posits the creation of an atmosphere in which West Indianness can be reflected in worship. Here native singing, Afro-West Indian drumming and dancing will come to the fore in the Churches' worship services.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

1. Summary

Colonial theology has contributed to the underdevelopment of the West Indian people. When the Church in the West Indies did not sanction the slavery of black people, it taught these people a gospel of submission.

Colonialism itself scorned things African, and as a consequence, left a white bias in the West Indian society. The Christian Church, instead of rebuking this monster of racism, interpreted Christianity in the interests of the West Indian colonists. The Church's teachings accentuated the importance of the soul while West Indian bodies were being brutalized. These teachings also posited the after-life as the place where black people would get redress for wrongs done to them.

These colonial elements still plague the West Indian society. They have given rise to classism and a spirit of inertia among the black West Indians which also contributes to the poverty of the region. The Church there still supports the ethic of the ruling class, while pointing the poor toward heaven. However, within recent years, the position of the Church has been attacked by the Black Power Movement

and other socially-minded people of the West Indies. There are also strong voices in the West Indian Church which are calling for a liberating Christianity which will rebuke injustice in its various forms and foster the welfare of West Indian people here and now. This study is one of those voices in the Church whose message is "Let my people go."

These Church voices are recognizing the importance of the Afro-Creole cults of the region. These cults, by their protest of European Christianity of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were the harbingers of the West Indian liberation theological thrust. The Africans who came to the West Indies as slaves, rather than abandoning their religions for Christianity, held Christianity in co-existence with their African religions. In so doing, the Afro-West Indian cults were vehicles for the preservation of African culture in the West Indies. Black West Indians now are identifying with this Afro-West Indian culture rather than aping European culture.

It appears that the only remedy for the situation which exists in the West Indian Church is the West Indianization of the Church. Then the Church's theology will focus on the spiritual, economic, and social needs of the West Indian man. It will not only deal with questions concerning the after-life, but will seek to enrich the Caribbean man's life here and now. A West Indian theology will issue in West Indian liturgy and worship patterns that are so badly needed in West Indian Church services.

2. Conclusions

This work has investigated historical factors which contributed to the past and present stances of the Church in the West Indies. It has found that slavery, colonialism, and colonial mission theology had a potent impact on the Church's outlook in the West Indies. The Church cooperated with slavery and colonialism to the extent that she tailored her theology to benefit colonial interests. She taught the West Indian blacks a gospel of submission.

Also when West Indians were suffering under the oppression of slavery and colonialism, the Church, instead of helping to deal realistically with these chafing systems, directed the people's attention away from their miserable lot. The Church pointed the suffering people to an after-life where their problems would be solved. Thus religion in the hands of the colonial Church was used as an opiate.

On the question of race relations in the West Indies, the Church took its cue from the European-dominated racist society. This society placed a great premium on the whiteness of one's skin and on things European. In the same vein, colonial West Indian society stigmatized blackness and belittled things African. To all these abuses the Christian Church gave its approbation. After three centuries of educational, economic, and political progress of the West Indian states, the Church still thinks in a colonial context.

The material presented in this study, hopefully,

provides sufficient documentation to suggest that a politically independent West Indian society will not tolerate a Church which tacitly supports the colonial ethic. It is therefore positing a West Indianization of the Church in the region to ensure the Church's relevancy and meaningfulness. It is pointing out the possibilities in the West Indian Church for the reflection of Caribbean Culture and theological perspectives.

It is the author's opinion that in cultural matters the West Indian society has been aping Europe for too long. When most progressive institutions in the region are casting off the moth-eaten garments of colonialism, the institutional Church there is clinging to them. In this work the author is strongly suggesting that the Church among a dominantly black people should reflect the African elements of the Caribbean culture. European cultural elements have been in the vanguard of the West Indian society for far too long. It is time for the many cultural strands in the West Indies to be reflected in the Church.

On the basis of this research, the author thinks that, given the far-reaching influence of the Church in the West Indies, the Church should not only reflect black West Indian culture, but should actively foster this culture. The Church should be among the leading voices which teach Christians in the West Indies to be proud of their culture. This study therefore sees the freeing of West Indians from cultural bondage to Europe as part of the God-given and people-expected

role of the Christian Church in the Caribbean.

Taking a cue from this study, it seems that the Church should not only reflect the culture, but the theological perspectives of the region. For a theology that was made in a foreign land and culture reflect that experience and culture in which it was structured. Therefore, such a theology is apparently irrelevant in the West Indian society. West Indians need their own theology that will speak to them in their own cultural milieu. West Indians need a theology that will put God back in their culture; a theology that will see great spiritual significance in the coming of three races from three different continents to converge on the small West Indies; a theology that will see the hand of God guiding the African slaves and indentured Indians in the West Indian plantation system.

This study has been positing a West Indian theology which will reflect some of the religious motifs of Afro-Creole cults in the West Indies. The West Indian Church will be strengthened when she includes the African sense of community and solidarity in her theology.

It is the point of this study that a new theology in the West Indies will give rise to a new and badly needed liturgy in the West Indian Church services. For instance, the question of singing should be examined. West Indians, being mainly of African descent, like to sing with enthusiasm. But unfortunately, they have been imprisoned in the singing of staid English hymns. Therefore in this work, the author

is advocating that West Indians jettison English-type singing and sing with all their native ability--sing from the blackness and brownness of their souls to the glory of God. To achieve this meaningful hymn-singing, it will be necessary for West Indians to produce their own hymns, sometimes in the local idiom. Already West Indians are discovering that their English-oriented hymns cannot express their struggles and strivings. It is with this consciousness that Jimmy Tucker, the Jamaican churchman and artist, has recently produced the hymn, "The Right Hand of God."

This hymn, written as the Caribbean Council of Churches' "Hymn of Liberation," is gaining wide acceptance among West Indian churches. The hymn has captured "the rhythm and vibrance of the people." Needless to say, a churchman from London, Geneva, or New York has neither the interest nor the perception to capture the "rhythm and vibrance" of West Indian people.

In short, from this study, it is apparent that West Indian Christians have been imprisoned culturally, theologically, and liturgically. This study is therefore advocating the freedom of West Indians to worship God in ways West Indian and not European; freedom to assert their blackness and brownness, and yet be Christians. But colonial theology (which is in great supply in the West Indies) thinks the affirmation of one's blackness and the practice of Christianity are incompatible. But a West Indian theology which this study posits affirms both West Indians being fully black and West

Indians being fully Christian. This theology agrees with Michael McCormack that the teaching and practice of the churches in the Caribbean must be such that the interpretation of Christ to the West Indian man will allow him to be fully West Indian and fully Christian.

But most West Indian churches see Jesus only in European features and ways. This is why the Black Power protest of the 1970s struck at the doors of the Church in Trinidad and poured black paint on the figure of Jesus in a Roman Catholic Cathedral. The author of this study shares Hamid's trenchant assessment of this episode: "When black paint was poured on the figure of Jesus, it was a despairing symbolic cry for the Jesus who would identify and deliver the underprivileged of the West Indies. It was a cry to let the real Jesus be freed to do his liberating, redemptive work." This work, then, is positing a decolonized Caribbean Church which will make black West Indians fully black and fully Christian.

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